

This is Not My Body:
Alienated Corporeality and Brechtian Critical Theatre Practices

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Ashley Majzels

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Michal Kobialka, Professor of Theatre Arts and Dance, Adviser

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Dedication

My dissertation is dedicated to my family: C, E, F, and S.

Abstract

My dissertation advances a historical materialist understanding of alienated corporeality meant to inform Brechtian critical theatre practices. In the first half of my project, I draw on Marx's account of commodity fetishism and industrial labour to frame a discussion of Brecht's *Mann ist Mann*. In the second half, I revise my account of alienated corporeality in the light of Guy Debord's account of spectacular society. I then use this spectacular corporeality as a means to address Canadian inter-media artist Freya Olafson's recent works, *AVATAR* and *HYPER_*, as well as her critical engagement with social media as labour, consumption, and ontology.

Table of Contents

List of Figures:.....	v
Introduction:.....	1
Chapter One: Corporeality under Commodity	20
Chapter Two: <i>Mann ist Mann</i> and Corporeality.....	39
Chapter Three: Brechtian Realism and Debord's Spectacle.....	87
Chapter Four: Broadcast Bodies: Freya Olafson's <i>Avatar</i> and <i>Hyper_</i>	133
Conclusion:.....	157
Illustrations:.....	159
Bibliography:.....	167

List of Figures

Figure 1 – <i>AVATAR</i> , 4m06s.....	159
Figure 2 – <i>AVATAR</i> , 16m01s.....	159
Figure 3 – <i>AVATAR</i> , 22m58s.....	160
Figure 4 – <i>AVATAR</i> , 45m53s.....	160
Figure 5 – <i>AVATAR</i> , Promotional Photo.....	161
Figure 6 – <i>AVATAR</i> , 2m14s.....	161
Figure 7 – <i>AVATAR</i> , 2m18s.....	162
Figure 8 – <i>AVATAR</i> , 2m19s.....	162
Figure 9 – <i>AVATAR</i> , 38m34s.....	163
Figure 10 – <i>AVATAR</i> , 38m52s.....	163
Figure 11 – <i>HYPER_</i> , “RGB”, 26m57s.....	164
Figure 12 – <i>HYPER_</i> , “Hyperbolic Doubt”, 34m33s.....	164
Figure 13 – <i>HYPER_</i> , “Above”, 43m34s.....	165
Figure 14 – <i>HYPER_</i> , “Above”, Promotional Photo.....	165
Figure 15 – <i>HYPER_</i> , “Object Oriented Ontology”, 51m24s.....	166
Figure 16 – <i>HYPER_</i> , “Object Oriented Ontology”, 52m47s.....	166

Introduction

My dissertation takes a historical materialist approach to bodies under capital in order to address bodies in Brechtian critical theatre practices. I provide an alternative theorization of embodiment suited to such practices, motivated by my difficulties and dissatisfaction with psychological and semiotic approaches. My intervention is doubled sided, in that I address lacunae in the treatment of alienated corporeality in both historical materialism and critical accounts of theatrical representation.

Recent interventions in theatre and performance studies have identified and problematized bodies in a number of ways. Feminist accounts of performance and performativity, which are of particular importance in these fields, frequently present bodies as products of social relations as well as the sites in which to reveal and contest those same relations of power. For example, Rebecca Schneider, in her 1997 *The Explicit Body in Performance*, finds “[t]he body made explicit has become the *mise en scene* for a variety of feminist artists” whose performance art involves “[u]nfolding the body, as if pulling back velvet curtains to expose a stage.” (2) As Schneider positions these artists exposing “the sedimented layers of signification,” her notion of 'explicit body' provides the venue in which to critically engage with “ghosts of historical meaning, markings delineating social hierarchies of privilege and disprivilege.” (2)

In his *Theatre, Body and Pleasure* from 2006, Simon Shepherd credits feminism with having “made the body into a key topic, politically and theoretically” and draws a range of tightly connected themes from body art into his predominantly phenomenological approach (2). He presents theatre as “a practice in which societies

negotiate around what the body is and means,” a negotiation whose significance arises “because many ideas about what is good, right, natural and possible are grounded in assumptions about what the body is, what it needs, how it works.” (1) Bringing both “the art of bodies” and “physical responses to that art” (9) into this negotiation, Shepherd argues for theatre as “an art of bodily possibility, an event where the limits of body are negotiated, fetishised, imagined somehow else.” (10)

In contrast, Yoshiki Tajiri's 2007 *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body: The Organs and Sense in Modernity* locates the significance of bodies in the intersection of two sources. The first is 'body' as implicated in a tradition of “deconstructive thought” in “the field of critical theory,” one that aims to “unsettle the integrity of self (identity) by introducing the other (difference).” (1) His account of prosthesis, “indeterminately between body and technology,” emerges from the deconstructive subversion of “binary oppositions such as mind/body.” (1) This is then joined to “the empirical reality of contemporary culture,” where “[t]he clear-cut distinction between the body (considered internal and organic) and technology (considered external and inorganic) is being rendered obsolete.” (2) Because of this constitutive role in both the indeterminacy of deconstructive practice and its threatened obsolescence in present circumstances, Tajiri foregrounds the importance of his notion of 'the prosthetic body' in registering how “Beckett's work is indelibly marked by the modernist involvement with technologies in the early twentieth century.” (5)

While I engage with some of these themes, I find there is a present need to address theatrical corporeality in terms of capitalist society and labour, especially where

conditions resembling those of Guy Debord's spectacle take hold. As technologies of image creation, transmission, and reception become endemic under capital, these conditions not only foreground the significance and difficulty of representing corporeality, but also threaten to foreclose the possibility of critical theatrical representation. My investigation of Brechtian theatre practices and historical materialist corporeality takes the possibilities and limitations of critical representation of bodies as a central concern. This commitment necessitates the other half of my intervention: where corporeality has appeared in recent historical materialist thought, it has done so without consideration of critical theatrical representation. Nevertheless, my account of corporeality draws on the Marxist understanding of productive dexterities and capabilities, and is closely related to a society's dominant form of alienated labour. Hence, my dissertation's research project asks how alienated corporeality and its representations are configured by capitalist labour processes and commodity fetishism, as found in Marx, and then again in Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*.

I look to Brecht's critical representations of alienated life in large part because of its compatibility with and attention to these concerns. Similarly, Freya Olafson's performance works *AVATAR* and *HYPER_* offer a critical approach to the emerging forms of labour (and their disguise as consumption) occasioned by social media. For these reasons, I investigate the critical representation of corporeality stemming from industrialized labour, a corporeality that takes form as the appendage of a machine, in Brecht's *Mann ist Mann*. Similarly, Freya Olafson's *AVATAR* and *HYPER_* form the basis for examining spectacle through the practices of social media, and the production of a

corporeality that operates as a screen, such as might be found in a laptop, a phone, or a cinema.

Informed by a re-engagement with a number of primarily left-Hegelian writers, including Ludwig Feuerbach, Theodor Adorno, György Lukács, Walter Benjamin, Raymond Williams, and Susan Buck-Morss, my dissertation contributes to the ongoing debates and theatrical projects that engage with alienation, corporeality and critical accounts of capitalism. In doing so, I identify the Marxist account of fetishism, particularly in its commodity form, as a decisive condition of possibility and limitation for corporeality in Brechtian approaches to critical representation of alienated life.

Chapter Overview

My first chapter begins my theorization of left-Hegelian corporeality through a close reading of Marx and Feuerbach. Here I relate the 'first fact' of historical materialism in *The German Ideology* to sensuousness, and then to alienated labour under capital. This chapter develops terminology used throughout the remainder of my dissertation.

I link this understanding of corporeality to my historiographic account of Brecht's *Mann ist Mann* in Chapter Two. In doing so, I consider of a conflict of imaginations that has formed and reformed the legibility of Brecht's critical project and the specific elements of the play. Even as my understanding of corporeality is deployed to provide a specific approach to this corpus, I do so in order for the specific configurations present in Brecht's work and its varied historical presentations to reflect upon and refine my understanding of corporeality. In particular, I look to the requirements and possibilities of a Brechtian critical theatrical practice and the medical-industrial production of prostheses

in inter-war Germany to revise my ongoing investigation of left-Hegelian bodies mediated by Marxist fetishism.

As detailed in Chapter One, the historical materialist 'first fact' of human organization forms the starting point for my treatment of corporeality. In Chapter Three, I consider the implications for both corporeality and Brechtian critical practices where the first fact is no longer that of Marx, but instead that of Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*. My turn to Debord's spectacle is informed by both the extraordinary challenge it poses to Brechtian critical representation, as well as its possibilities for grappling with the conditions of those nations now entertaining the ideological fantasy of 'post-industrial' existence. Focusing on Debord's understanding of spectacle as the culmination of commodity fetishism, I again revise my understanding of corporeality in the light of a society where the dominant object-form mediating human relations is image.

In the fourth and final chapter, I bring the corporeality discussed in Chapter Three into contact with Freya Olafson's recent performance works, *AVATAR* and *HYPER_*. As with the second chapter and Brecht's *Mann ist Mann*, my theorization of corporeality is used to unfold the work, while at the same time looking to the particular configurations of the work to return and revise that theorization. Here, my approach foregrounds the interaction of 'immaterial labour' and social media, and the confusions of productive activity and consumption that attend these practices. I also consider the technological mediation of critical activity in Olafson's *HYPER_* through a consideration of Raymond Williams' notion of 'complex seeing.'

An Account of the Field/Fetishism

In coming to the intersection of left-Hegelian embodiment and critical theatre practices, it is precisely the absence I find there that drives my work here. Nevertheless, there are suggestive discourses on bodies and corporealities emerging from Marxist thinkers as well as critical studies in contemporary theatre, dance and performance. However, while corporeality appears as a term of investigation in recent Marxist thought, it tends to do so as a part of a discourse on human nature, which does not address the conditions of critical representation, while also introducing problematic considerations of transhistorical being. On the other hand, theatre and related performance arts have found productive and politically engaged understandings of bodies from feminist writers, whose approaches, particularly those involving a post-structural re-consideration of Lacan, do not appear to offer traction on the objects of Brecht's critical practice. Of course, following authors such as Elin Diamond and Karen Laughlin, there has been a substantial and productive feminist appropriation and re-evaluation of Brechtian techniques, including hybrid encounters with gender performativity and disability studies. However, this meeting of Brecht and bodies has not rebounded to an investigation of embodiment in Brecht's work, which often appears in theatre studies as an ontologizing aspect of actor training or style. Additionally, Chapter Three deals with specific issues related to the use of semiotics when confronting the conditions and critical project found in Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*. These concerns motivate my efforts to investigate a historical materialist account of alienated corporeality in the light of Marxist fetishism for

this understanding of bodies. Due to the significance of this form on my account of corporeality, here I provide a review of selected major considerations of fetishism.

Fetishes – Psychological and Psychoanalytic

My understanding of bodies and embodiment owes a great deal to writers such as Susan Bordo, Laura Mulvey and Judith Butler, and their approaches to embodiment have inspired my own. Indeed, the basis of my dissertation, that a Marxist understanding of alienated corporeality can be discerned in the light of fetishism under capital, stems from the recognition that despite their irreducible differences, these authors (among others) share closely related notions of fetishism which profoundly informs their accounts of bodies. These concepts of fetishism might be characterized as psycho-sexual understandings, which are often informed by a feminist appropriation and re-purposing of Jacques Lacan's thought.

A brief sketch of this psychological, and later psychoanalytic, sense of fetishism might take as its starting point Alfred Binet's discovery of a sexual disorder unique to men. This disorder, named 'erotic' or 'sexual' fetishism in Binet's 1887 essay “Le Fétichisme dans l'Amour,” was then included in Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* in an entry which closely followed Binet's formulation: an exclusively male difficulty in which sexual attention did not alight upon the female, but upon an object.

Freud's extensive writing on this species of fetish included introducing a psychoanalytic mechanism: the boy's terror of maternal castration causes him to recoil from women, but upon his sexual maturity, erotic attachments to the female are to be

established through socialization. Failures or interruptions in this heteronormative realignment are likely to leave the young man's attentions 'astray' and result in an erotic fetish.

Jacques Lacan's work breaks with this ordering of gender and fetish, and offers a number of possibilities by which to think a psychosexual fetishism not restricted to the male psyche. For example, Lacan's 1958 lecture, "The Signification of the Phallus," implied that fetishism was a fundamental aspect of (heteronormative) female sexuality, and hence far more widespread amongst women than men.

His former student Piera Aulagnier-Spaurani, along with other analysts of the 'Fourth Group,' explicitly worked to elaborate a female fetishism in their 1967 *Le Désir et la Perversion*. Subsequent authors writing in English have engaged in critical feminist reevaluations of this tradition of fetishism and its potential for subversive political significance, such as Naomi Schor in her 1985 "Female Fetishism: The Case of George Sand," Elizabeth Grosz's "Lesbian Fetishism?" from 1990, and Judith Butler's "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary" in her *Bodies that Matter*.

Fetishes – Anthropological, Religious, and Economic

But of course, this displacement of erotic desire is not the only sense of fetishism. William Pietz's "The Problem of the Fetish" offers a historical exploration of that term, the first part of which focuses on the sense in which 'fetish,' from the Portuguese "pidgin word Fetisso," (5) emerges in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in "intercultural spaces" along the West African coast, spaces "whose function was to translate and transvalue objects between radically different social systems." (6) This exchange between

peoples results in “a novel object not proper to any prior discrete society” and “a novel word responsive to an unprecedented type of situation.” (6) 'Fetish' is then a foreign word for a foreign object, a Portuguese term for the production of a West African labour process, adopted by West Africans producing an object intended for the consumption of a European market.¹ Pietz tells us that fetishes come into being conjoint with “the emergent articulation of the ideology of the commodity form” in these exchanges between non- or pre- capitalist societies (7).

From this, Pietz identifies the fetish as a material form marking and reenacting an event: an event by which otherwise dis- or un-connected elements (peoples, societies, materials, practices) are gathered, reshaped and brought into definite relation.

In tracing subsequent events in Enlightenment thought on the fetish, Pietz places a particular emphasis on Charles de Brosses' *Du culte des dieux fétiches, ou Parallèle de l'ancienne religion de l'Egypte avec la religion actuelle de Nigritie* (1757, published 1760).² Pietz notes that this text coins the term 'fétichisme,' and that Marx draws on a German translation of the piece for his initial discussion of fetishes and fetishism in 1842. Amidst what Pietz characterizes as a 'long' nineteenth-century “dissemination into a host of popular and social scientific discourses,” (5) he presents Marx's usage of 'fetish' in its “comparative method for critically analyzing the value system of one type of society by framing it in terms of the value systems of societies with other modes of production.”

¹ From this mutual foreignness, Pietz extends “the historical field of the fetish” to include other objects, including Akan goldweights and the stone pillars, *padrões*, placed by Portuguese explorers as “claims of possession and as navigational landmarks” that “functioned to territorialize the codes of Christianity and Portuguese feudalism into the African landscape.” (16-7) He finds that “the Europeans understood that the Africans had come to regard the *padrão* as a fetish.” (17)

² Often translated in English as *The Worship of the Divine Fetish* or *The Cult of the Fetish Gods*. In this latter form, DeBrosses' piece is taken up by Bruno Latour in his *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*.

(note 24, 11) Pietz draws our attention here to the critical possibilities adhering to the inter- or cross-cultural sense of the fetish: he identifies Marx's usage of “religious terminology to critically characterize commodity ideology, and vice versa” as operating according to the composite logic of this fetish (note 24, 11).

The reference to Marx's first discussion of fetishism in 1842 is to an article published in three parts in *Rheinische Zeitung*, the newspaper edited by Marx at that time, responding to a piece by Karl Heinrich Hermes, editor of the rival *Kölnische Zeitung*. Of specific interest is a passage in which Hermes approvingly cites Hegel, holding that fetishism is the 'crudest' manifestation of religious practice, to which Marx rebuts:

Fetishism is so far from raising man above his sensuous desires that, on the contrary, it is “the religion of sensuous desire”. Fantasy arising from desire deceives the fetish-worshipper into believing that an 'inanimate object' will give up its natural character in order to comply with his desires. Hence the crude desire of the fetish-worshipper smashes the fetish when it ceases to be its most obedient servant. (*Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol 1, 189)

Notably, this intervention identifies the location of this fantastical power in the 'natural character' of the fetish object. In his subsequent thinking about fetishism, which changes focus from religious to economic phenomena, Marx finds that fetishes under capital acquire their fantastical aspect not from 'natural character,' but from social activity that appears as if it were 'natural character.' Marx frequently applies the term 'fetish-character'

to this secular capitalist process in order to distinguish it from his account of the religious form of fetishism.

Marx discerns two such fetish-characters under capital, that of the commodity, and that of capital itself.³ The capital fetish, which Marx discusses most extensively in *Capital*, volume 3, is typified by interest-bearing capital, for this is where the “relations of capital assume their most external and most fetish-like form.” (*Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol 37, 388) Interest-bearing capital, on the one hand, “appears as a mere thing,” as the social relations and activity that create it are 'externalized' in this object-form (389). On the other hand, interest-bearing capital possess a peculiar capacity for social activity: “Capital appears as a mysterious and self-creating source of interest – the source of its own increase.” (389) This is the fetish-character of capital, in which a 'mere thing' undertakes social activity on behalf of its owners: the power of self-increase, which stems from social relations, appears as though it were inherent in capital, as though it were part of the 'natural character' of the object.

As I develop it in Chapter One, my account of Marxist corporeality turns upon the other fetish-character in *Capital*, that of the commodity. Unlike interest-bearing capital, commodities engage in social activity on behalf of the workers who create but do not own them: while the fetish-character of capital appears as the power of self-increase, commodities engage in social activity to reconnect producers who have been alienated by industrial specialization and the relations of property under capital. The fetish-character of the commodity arrives in the sense of relations between objects standing in the place of relations between people, as Marx describes in *Capital*, volume 1: “the mutual

³ Michael Taussig's “*Maleficium*: State Fetishism” argues for the addition of a third to these.

relations of the producers, within which the social character of their labour affirms itself, take the form of a social relation between the products.” (*Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol 35, 82) As this palliative sociality is only available through the circulation of commodities, it requires further alienation, as part of the worker's capacity for social activity is transferred to the products of her labour.

Nevertheless, in some regards, the commodity fetish-character shares the same form as that of capital, where the outcome of social relations of production has social activity transferred to it, becoming an object with subjective qualities, as if this were its 'natural character.' This well known passage from Ben Fowkes translation of *Capital*, volume 1, glosses the peculiar composition of the fetish as “socio-natural properties”:

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. (165)

This composite form is again referenced by Marx when, in Fowkes' translation, he accounts for commodities as “sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social” (165), a passage which is rendered in *Marx and Engels Collected Works* as “social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.” (vol 35, 83) The social, and hence imperceptible, qualities of commodities includes this fetishistic sociality of objects as a significant feature. In part, because these social characteristics are 'supra-sensible', they impose themselves as above and against

the sensuous experience of the world, such that the false world of commodity-fetishism comes to appear in preference to the world of actually existing relations of class and production. My examination of the consequences of this substitution can be found in Chapter Three, in the discussion of commodity fetishism as found in Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*.

As mentioned above, the discussion of commodity fetishism is the occasion of Marx utilizing the terminologies of religion, superstition and the supernatural as part of a critical position on the commodity form. In addition to their 'mysterious' power, Marx also indicates the “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” attending commodities, along with their “mystical,” and “fantastic” appearances, and their “magic and necromancy.” (trans. Fowkes, 163-9) Of course, Marx does not invoke these discourses to suggest or rely on their validity. Instead, this language is meant to expose the power of the fetish and its misrecognition by rendering it foreign and even ridiculous to the capitalist society Marx confronted in Europe.

While Marx invokes the supernatural, in part, to ridicule the mysteries of commodities, this is not the only mode in which the fetish might serve a critical account. For example, Michael Taussig, in his 1980 *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, takes up the inter- or cross-cultural composition of the fetish, “this potential that lies within the anthropologist's grasp,” (10) in his account of the “folklore of contemporary plantation workers and miners in South America.” (xv) Taussig looks to the experiences and adaptive practices of these peasants as they are drawn into “capitalist relations of production” and “proletarianized” (3):

These peasants represent as vividly unnatural, even as evil, practices that most of us in commodity-based societies have come to accept as natural in the everyday workings of our economy, and therefore of the world in general. This representation [...] neither occurs in nor refers to peasant ways of life. (3)

His attack on commodity fetishism, specifically against the “phantom objectivity” of “things that stand over, control, and in some vital sense even may produce people,” does not involve making this power ridiculous (5). Instead, he takes the appearance of devil fetishes and the “baptism of the bill” as a significant register of capitalist endeavor, and as a means to investigate and identify the mechanisms of a society coming into contact with commodity fetishism (126).

Despite the relatively short portion of *Capital* that Marx dedicates to commodity fetishism, its treatment by subsequent authors has greatly expanded both the analytic scope and significance of this form. These more recent discourses involve discerning and developing a number of characteristics of particular importance for my project, including its composite form and its alienating capacity to engage in a sociality otherwise unavailable due to the relations of production.

Amongst these characteristics, the role of fetishism in ideology and ideological obfuscation has, in certain traditions of Marxist thought, occasionally been presented as the sole significance of fetishism. Here I am thinking of *Reading Capital*, in which Louis Althusser offers a very narrow exegesis of fetishism:

If we follow Marx here, too, this detour via primitive societies, etc., will only have been necessary in order to see clearly in them what our own society hides from us: i.e., in order to *see clearly* in them that the economic is *never clearly visible*, does not coincide with the 'given' in them any more than in any other reality (political, ideological, etc.). This is all the more 'obvious' for the capitalist mode of production in that we know that the latter is the mode of production in which *fetishism* affects the economic region *par excellence*. (179)

This account, in which the sense of cross- or inter-cultural critical possibility offers only a testament to a generalized obscurity, is then confirmed in the same volume by Étienne Balibar's contribution, which finds that:

[...] the capitalist mode of production is both the mode of production in which the economy is most easily recognized as the 'motor' of history, and the mode of production in which the essence of this 'economy' is unrecognized in principle (in what Marx calls 'fetishism'). (216)

Here, fetishism is neither productive nor composite, consisting only in mystification, and subsequently reduced to its role in ideology. Of course, economic fetishism does produce mystifications, particularly that in which social activity is externalized and then recognized in objects, but this is neither the source nor full significance of economic fetishism.

Amongst those who take up commodity fetishism and extend rather than reduce its role, a grouping which would include both Adorno and Debord, György Lukács account of reification is often cited as a source of particular importance. Beginning from Marx's discussion of commodity fetishism, Lukács looks to the conditions when and where the commodity becomes the dominant social form. Here, he finds reification takes hold, as a more general procedure by which social and subjective processes become objects. Even as it stems from the commodity form, reification comes to subsume the commodity, and extend its reach into further domains. Lukács discerns a principle ordering the procedures of commodity and reification, “the principle of rationalisation based on what is and *can be calculated*.” (*History and Class Consciousness*, 88) The principle of 'calculability' in the commodity form brings consciousness into the remit of reification:

The commodity character of the commodity, the abstract, quantitative mode of calculability shows itself here in its purest form: the reified mind necessarily sees it as the form in which its own authentic immediacy becomes manifest and – as reified consciousness – does not even attempt to transcend it. (93)

In the reified mind, the process and contents of thought become objects in the cast of the commodity, and that which objectifies social being is mistaken for the fullest realization of human relations. This inversion, by which reified thought takes its objectification as realization, marks an important feature of commodity fetishism in Lukács as well as Debord.

An important aspect that should be emphasized here is that the fetish-character of commodities does not arise from internal mental activity, but from social relations, and can only be altered by change in those relations. It is an objective, and not a subjective appearance at issue, and it cannot be dispelled by thought alone. In addressing this, G.A. Cohen offers a useful distinction: "The false appearance is, rather like a mirage (and unlike a hallucination), located in the external world." (*Karl Marx's Theory of History*, 115-6) He also notes a contrast in his account of the religious fetish-form as distinct from that of the commodity: "In economic fetishism there is a gulf between reality and its own appearance. The mind registers the fetish. It does not, as in the religious case, create it." (116)

If this is the furthest Cohen is willing to venture on the power of consciousness to apprehend commodity fetishism, Adorno, in a letter to Walter Benjamin, goes considerably further on the relation of fetishism to mind: "the fetish character of the commodity is not a fact of consciousness, but dialectic in the eminent sense that it produces consciousness." (qtd. in Buck-Morss, p. 121) Perhaps this reversal, where consciousness is produced by fetishism, offers a means to reconsider Cohen's understanding of the origins of religious fetishism: in any case, it provides a frame in which to consider Alfred Sohn-Rethel's contribution to the understanding of fetish-forms and consciousness. In his 1978 *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, Sohn-Rethel presents his project as being in the same cast as Marx's critical account, but directed at the domain of epistemology under capital, instead of political economy. As part of this change, in place of fetishism, Sohn-Rethel uses the

terms “nexus of society” and “social synthesis”⁴ to address a social structure similar to that of Marx's commodity fetishism (29).

A subtle but significant change in this reordering of critical territory is found in the practices from which commodity fetishism or social synthesis emerge: Marx's account looks to alienated production aimed at markets, Sohn-Rethel's to the law of abstract exchange. This form of exchange, dominant under capital, is “*a real abstraction* resulting from spatio-temporal activity,” (20) and, as Sohn-Rethel stresses, is an abstraction that exists in the mind but does not stem from thought: “It is the action of exchange, and the action alone, that is abstract. The consciousness and the action of the people part company in exchange and go different ways.” (26)

This parting of ways, where “*the action is social, the minds are private*,” results in the intellectual and manual labours of Sohn-Rethel's title (28-9). Sohn-Rethel is careful to note this is a difference of emphasis and privilege rather than an absolute split, but nevertheless offers an account of the emergence of a corporeality divided into 'head' and 'hand,' a split that reproduces and reinforces the class divide. From this, Sohn-Rethel proceeds to identify a number of categories of intellectual labour, including “abstract quantity,” (46) “abstract time and space,” (48) “abstract movement,” (53) and a specific form of “strict causality” (54). From these particulars, he discerns the formation of an “abstract intellectual labour,” which “relies from the outset on terms of logical uniformity and universality” (76). In each of these categories and terms, Sohn-Rethel finds that it is intellectual (and not manual) labour that takes up the formal characteristics of real

⁴ Sohn-Rethel clarifies his specific choice of 'synthesis', as it, “in a meaning strange to English readers, allows the convenient adjective 'socially synthetic.’” (37) This usage is selected as part of Sohn-Rethel's contention with Kant's thinking, in order to “pay transcendental idealism back in its own coin.” (37)

abstraction. Under the heading “The Social Form of Thinking”, he finds that it is intellectual labour that “moves in the mould of the formal elements of the social synthesis.” (76) Not only does fetishism give rise to consciousness, as Adorno advances, but to recognize and register fetishism, as per Cohen, requires intellectual labour, which reproduces the logic of social synthesis, the epistemological analogue to fetishism.

Summary

By associating Marx's commodity fetishism to his account of sensuousness, I develop a means to discuss corporeality that is well-suited for pursuing the possibilities and limitations of Brecht's epic theatre. My emphasis on fetishism also permits the introduction of Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* as a means to revise and further develop this account of corporeality in a left-Hegelian tradition, before engaging it in an account of the recent performance work of Freya Olafson.

Chapter One – Corporeality under Commodity

In this chapter I look to a Left-Hegelian tradition, particularly that which links Ludwig Feuerbach to Marx, to discern the organization, composition, and potential significance of bodies in alienated social conditions. Although this framework is explicitly meant to provide a working theory to be refined and reconsidered in contact with Brecht's work in the next chapter, here I develop concepts and terminology that informs the remainder of my dissertation.

This chapter starts with Marx and Engels' account of historical materialism in *The German Ideology* and the sense of 'human physical (corporeal) organization' they develop there. This leads me to an examination of a number of passages in Marx's *Capital*, and in doing so, I characterize Marxist corporeality as a collective organization of productive activities and capacities. I then return to Feuerbach's work on 'the body', sensuousness, and theological alienation as a means to inform Marx's concept of fetishism and role in organizing capitalist society. I conclude that this alienating mediation forms a fragmented corporeality that is then falsely re-integrated by that same alienated practice that shattered it.

Human organism and human organization

The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus the first fact to be established is the physical organization of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature.

– Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 37.

In this passage, Marx and Engels assign a primacy and privilege to the 'physical organization' of human life. They establish an aspect of 'human individuals', specifically “their activity and the material conditions under which they live,” as a starting point, the 'first fact' of historical thought (37). Can this sense of 'human physical organization and activity' be made to agree with a concept of a body or bodies?

Discussion of human 'organization and activity' can be found throughout Marx's own work, sometimes in a suggestive proximity to bodies or pieces of bodies: “productive activities,” as presented in *Capital Volume I*, involve “expenditure of human brain, nerves, muscles and sense organs,” alongside other “functions of the human organism” (164). Marx further identifies this organism in its labour-capacity or -capacities, “the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being,” an aggregation that takes up brain and muscle alike, recognizing no strict separation of body and mind (270). And wherever this organism is found in Marx's work, it is never far from the organization of its activity. Indeed, the human organism is only found within productive activities as “what remains” when “we leave aside the determinate quality,” the “useful character of the labour,” and the necessary development of labour-power for a particular specialization or activity (134). Whatever appears of human bodies or organisms does so in ongoing contact with human organization: how might this configuration of bodies and organization be understood?

The interaction between organism and organization is present in a substantial literature on Marx, albeit one that tends to address the register of human essences or

natures, rather than bodies. One tradition in this vein takes its lead from Louis Althusser's approach. In his 1964 "Marxism and Humanism," Althusser draws on Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach, which reads in part: "the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations" (*Marx and Engels Collected Works* vol 5, 7). Althusser reads this as a signal element of an ongoing break with idealist conceptions of society, specifically those which present the individual subject and human essence in a 'correspondence' so thorough-going as to be invisible. Althusser identifies historical materialism as displacing both human subject and human essence from their unquestioned remove, and he comes to insist on 'Marx's theoretical anti-humanism'. In doing so, Althusser notes one such displacement that bears directly on the question at hand: the "rejection of the myth of *homo economicus*, that is, of the individual with definite faculties and needs as the *subject* of the classical economy" (*For Marx* 228). Implicit here is that Marx's account of productive activities dispenses with the ideological assumptions of classical economics, and recognizes that the capacities, faculties and needs at issue are neither *individual* nor *definite*, but collective and historical.

Martha Harnecker, who studied with Althusser, elaborates on the character of these productive activities in her 1994 defense of 'theoretical anti-humanism'. Reading Althusser's later work into the discussion, Harnecker's account makes explicit that productive activities are to be recognized in the 'social relations of production' and that "things also intervene" in these relations (*Althusser and the "Theoretical Antihumanism" of Marx* 332). Harnecker identifies the means of production as 'things' which intervene in

social relations, as class relations to and through the means of production form “relations between agents of production, that is, between those who have a determined function in the production of material goods” (331-2). Here, productive functions of human organisms are not determinate, but *become* determined by their relation to class and the objects by which production is practiced.

In his 2005 “Beyond the Human-Nature Debate,” Joseph Fracchia sets himself against the Althusserian tradition in which the sixth thesis on Feuerbach is understood to deny any and all “human constants” (33). In laying out his argument, Fracchia reconsiders the English translation of Marx's 'körperliche Organisation der Menschen' as human *physical* organization, preferring *corporeal* in its place, a usage which I adopt.

In contrast to Althusser's discussion of human *essence*, Fracchia works to rescue a notion of human *nature*, and does so by means of a return to the 'first fact' of historical materialism, a passing affinity with my own approach. However, Fracchia sees Marx's 'first fact' as “about human universals,” and as a statement that “alluded to the transhistorical attributes of human corporeal organisation” (40). Unlike Fracchia, my reading of the 'first fact' turns on the need for it to be *established*, which I take to be a matter of its historicity, and not its derivation from transhistorical universals.

A very different approach to human nature can be found in György Lukács' discussions of this matter. In his *Theory of the Novel*, Lukács distinguishes between first and second natures, both of which are products of alienation: the first appears as nostalgia for a mode of existence that has been lost, while the second is the outcome of the present alienated and alienating human organization. Crucially, Lukács' emphasizes that the first

nature is produced by the second, as it emerges retrospectively from the distress of second nature.

These terms, which serve to organize the epic and the novel, are put to a further use in Lukács' account of reification. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács distinguishes a specific moment in the development of commodity production, one in which the understanding of objects or object-form is no longer separable from the commodity form. Under such conditions, human organism and organization alike are recognized according to the contours of commodity fetishism. Where Harnecker's account includes the 'intervention of things' in social relations, Lukács' regards the alteration of the object form under commodity fetishism as decisive: the objects that intervene do so not according to their own nature, but that descending from the commodity. This extends to the aspects of 'human organism' that are made manifest in productive activity: as Marx observes in *Capital* volume 1, capitalist society “appears as an 'immense collection of commodities',” (124) and not as a collection of expended “human muscle, nerve, brain, &c” (274).

Corporeality then, understood as collective capacities addressing the objects and activities of production, is intimately bound up with the specific historical organization of human life, which, under capital, cannot be removed from commodity fetishism.

Corporeality as fragment

This understanding offers a particular light by which to appreciate certain accounts Marx provides in volume one of *Capital*, in which “the individual himself is divided up, and transformed into the automatic motor of a detail operation” (481).

Reading Marx's account as a discussion of human corporeal organization, this organization is divided, that is, *alienated*, in a number of senses. These divisions include workers being isolated from others by the rigors of specialized labour, as each is assigned a specific part in the chain of production, a 'detail operation.' That same specialized labour leaves workers dependent on capital to work, as “the manufacturing worker develops his productive activity only as an appendage of that workshop” (482). Here, the sense of corporeality as both subject activity and object ('an appendage') is apparent. Significantly, subjective activity and objective being come to configure one another: only as 'an appendage' can workers improve productive capacities, and as this activity is developed, the worker becomes ever more dependent, ever more 'an appendage'. Similarly, when Marx describes how manufacture “converts the worker into a crippled monstrosity,” developing only those creative capacities which can be sold, which leads to “the suppression of a whole world of productive drives and inclinations,” this suppression of creative capacities and the 'crippled monstrosity' go hand in hand, as the need to sell ones labour impacts the subjective, active character of corporeality as well as the objective aspect (481). Productive specialization under capitalism rends corporeality, such that both organization and activity come to further damage and suppress the other.

This account of corporeality and capital, while identifying 'human individuals', depends on a collective organization that fractures the notion of 'individual' on a number of levels: individuality is found to be 'divided up', fragmented by the procedures of capitalism, as numerous passages in *Capital* attest. For example, Marx's discussion of the division of labour under large-scale industry, described as “converting the worker into a

living appendage of the machine,” renders individuality into a part, a subsidiary to the physical organization and activity of a machine (614). That which 'divides', 'converts' or 'transforms' the worker obviously arrives from outside the worker, but it is nevertheless a necessary aspect of the worker's corporeal organization. Corporeal organization, in this account, includes the objects and strictures of capital as part of actually lived activities and the circumstances in which these activities are practiced, and that these deny recourse to individuality or corporeal integrity.

It is these procedures of division that Marx identifies as “realizing the absurd fable of Menenius Agrippa, which presents man as a mere fragment of his own body” (481-2). The reference here is to an account of Menenius Agrippa, in which this Roman patrician is confronted by unhappy plebeians. He addresses their objections to the division of labour and wealth by making an analogy between the organization of the state and of the body: the plebeian is the arm, the patrician the stomach, and the arm must feed the stomach or starve along with it.

What is particularly striking in this passage is that Marx positions 'man as a mere fragment of his own body'. The body is both the location and the measurement of this fragmentation. On the one hand, the worker's body is divided, yet on the other hand, the worker becomes a fragment of 'his own body'. This corporeal fragmentation operates on an 'individual' now divided internally as well as reduced to a part externally: a body is the register of both these processes, and it is against the figure of 'his own body' that these transformations occur. However, it is clear that 'his own body' is not altogether 'his' any longer. The capitalist's machine, of which the worker is an appendage or 'automatic

motor', intervenes in the worker's body. As the worker comes to resemble a piece of a machine, the machine begins to appear as that which has been lost, as a body prior to fragmentation.

Considered as a process of historicizing, there are two bodies at issue. In the various accounts of industrial labour, in which workers are 'divided up' and converted into a 'crippled monstrosity' or a 'living appendage of the machine', appears to imply or even require some prior existence against which the distortions of capital can be made legible. This would be a corporeality before or outside capital, a 'whole', unfragmented body. Aside from whatever specifics might be associated with this prior, 'whole' body (and Marx provides none), it must offer sufficient difference from the present corporeality such that the transformations and conversions of capital can be discerned. Bodies are both the background and the text of this history. However, these bodies cannot be the 'first fact' of a historical materialism as discussed above. Aside from the collective, organizational character of the 'first fact', these bodies appear 'before' and 'after' capital, and cannot both inform a 'first fact'. Additionally, if the whole body is needed in order for the fragmented body to be legible, the 'first fact' does not offer a stable background against which the unfolding of the present condition could be seen. If the fragmented body, presented by Marx in the present tense, is the 'first fact' of his account, then what is the status of the other body, the 'whole' body, the body that has been lost, or been displaced onto the machine?⁵

⁵ In Lukács' terms, the sense of a lost body would correspond to first nature, and the currently realized alienation of industrial labour would form second nature

The sense of a prior body, a whole body, need not be sought out as a historical reality nor as a transhistorical certainty, but as a *product* of the current corporeal organization. The need to recognize a body undistorted by capital only arises subsequent to those very same distortions. Recognition of a fragmented corporeality permits and requires us to imagine, in contrast, a non-fragmented, whole body. This body must also be imagined as prior to, or otherwise outside of, the transformations and conversions that lead to the present, fragmented corporeality. This whole body, neither observed nor established, is located in, and as, the imagined past. A past image of wholeness is a *result* of the present fragmented corporeality: however, as this wholeness appears prior to the present circumstance, so it must also appear to have contributed to the present situation. Such is the logic of an imagined body, a seeming cause that is actually an outcome: this body, imagined to be prior and whole, is an idealist account, and alongside the notion of the individual, is an ideological product of the practices which deny it, such that a whole or individual body arrives as part of an alienated corporeality.

Feuerbach and the 'natural' body

Besides the retrospective necessary to distinguish the present corporeality, there is, at least, one additional source for this idealized 'whole' body. The first of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* begins:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism - that of Feuerbach included - is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object* or of *contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence, in

contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism -- which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such.

Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* activity. (*The German Ideology*, 469)

Amongst the various sensuous objects Ludwig Feuerbach desires, 'the body' is of singular importance. A major theme of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* is his determination to overcome the dualistic thinking of matter and spirit as belonging to distinct, fundamentally irreducible orders of being. Regarding such understandings as falsehoods that produce a state of "disunion," it is "nature," as a register of being, that Feuerbach looks to for the (re)unification and continued coexistence of that which is unduly divided against itself: "Disunion exists only between beings who are at variance, but who ought to be one, who can be one, and who consequently in nature, in truth, are one." (23)

Feuerbach's disunion is then a species of alienation, presented here as a fracture in that which should not be broken. In making a being alien to itself, disunion produces a particular suffering: "Every separation of beings essentially allied is painful" (183). Feuerbach holds that this pain is the fault of conceptions of spirit, and the reason attending to spirit, which are irreconcilable with sensuousness, that is, with sensory experience and the reason arising from such. His method is to examine these abstract

forms of reason and spirit and discover within them the sensuous basis they conceal and divide. This leads him to place a particular emphasis on 'the body':

Personality, individuality, consciousness, without Nature, is nothing; or, which is the same thing, an empty, unsubstantial abstraction. But Nature, as has been shown and is obvious, is nothing without corporeality. The body alone is that negating, limiting, concentrating, circumscribing force, without which no personality is conceivable. Take away from thy personality its body, and thou takest away that which holds it together. (*Essence of Christianity* 91)

The sense of 'the body' here is that which provides limits and resistance, and, by means of those limits, gives definition to, and permits the continuing existence of, 'personality'.

Without corporeality, which is here equated with the body, thought is 'empty', 'unsubstantial', 'nothing', and only the body is 'that which holds it together'. Feuerbach presents this 'holding together' as an exclusive feature of the body, as the sole source of determinate form for thought, and of sensuousness for contemplation. In this way, 'the body' does not provide a vessel for consciousness, but instead forms the condition of any possible consciousness, doing so by means of curtailing and constraining that consciousness. To combat the pain of disunion, which is a sensuous suffering brought on by the thinking of certain abstractions, specifically those of the then-current Christianity, the body is looked to as that which 'holds it together', that which integrates what has been separated, and that which preserves the integrity of 'natural' being.

Feuerbach also looks to the body as a means for historicizing. For example, in his essay “Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy,” when he accounts for Hegel's contribution to thought:

Hegel elevated us to a higher stage, i.e., to the class of *articulata* whose highest order is constituted by insects. Hegel's spirit is logical, determinate, and – I would like to say – entomological; in other words, Hegel's is a spirit that finds its appropriate dwelling in a body with numerous protruding members and with deep fissures and sections. This spirit manifests itself particularly in its view and treatment of history. (95)

Hegel is assigned an insectile body as the 'appropriate' manifestation of his historical method, which Feuerbach regards as knowing “only subordination and succession; coordination and coexistence are unknown to it” (96). In contrast, while claiming something of the tolerance that he finds lacking in Hegel's work, Feuerbach implicitly positions his own thought as that appropriate to the human body: “nature has made man the master of animals, but it has given him not only hands to tame animals but also eyes and ears to admire them” (96).

The sense here is of a history and a hierarchy of historical forms in a 'natural' register. As Hegel's spirit is assigned to the insectile, and Feuerbach comes to position his own thought as human, a narrative of natural superiority⁶ or development is made identical to a narrative of philosophical thought and historical method. As from the insect

⁶ The sources of Feuerbach's thinking on biological hierarchy are beside the point here: it suffices to recognize that his anti-theological work nevertheless leaves 'Man' as the master of lesser forms.

to the human, so Hegel's 'spirit' leads on to Feuerbach's 'nature'. Feuerbach implicitly claims that which he identifies Hegel's work as lacking: “The Hegelian method boasts of taking the same course as nature. It is true that it imitates nature, but the copy lacks the life of the original” (96). It is thus no coincidence that Feuerbach positions the process of history as identical to the process of nature, for the two are one and the same in his terms. Crucially, these narratives both arrive at the sensuous human body.

Alienation and Fetishism

Marx's fourth thesis on Feuerbach reads:

Feuerbach starts out from the fact of religious self-alienation, of the duplication of the world into a religious world and a secular one. His work consists in resolving the religious world into its secular basis. But that the secular basis detaches itself from itself and establishes itself as an independent realm in the clouds can only be explained by the cleavages and self-contradictions within this secular basis.

The latter must, therefore, in itself be both understood in its contradiction and revolutionized in practice. Thus, for instance, after the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be destroyed in theory and in practice.

(Marx and Engels Collected Works vol 5, 7)

Where Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach critiqued the lack of sensuous activity, the fourth asserts that Feuerbach's attempt to resolve alienation (in Feuerbach's terms, 'disunion')

has mistaken the secular world ('nature') as the solution, when it is in fact the source of this division.

The fourth thesis might have as easily taken the body, instead of the family, as its example; *The Essence of Christianity* does indeed address the holy body, as found in the doctrines of incarnation and transubstantiation, and does in fact discover the worldly body that lies behind them. But this body, the body 'that holds together', which presents itself as unified and integral in the face of the religious thought that would divide it, does not address the alienation of its secular circumstances. Marx contends that it is the divisions within the secular world that gave rise to the religious alienation, and so to overcome the spiritual and return to the secular is to have diagnosed and addressed only the symptom. As the whole body presents a false unity, one which obscures a divisive reality, it falls to Marx's work to destroy it, 'in theory and practice'.

As was previously discussed, the 'whole' body that offers a legibility to the present circumstance is an idealized form. Can the same be said of Feuerbach's 'natural' body, which insists on the sensuous? Recalling Marx's first thesis, the criticism is that the sensuousness Feuerbach considers belongs to objects or to contemplation, and not to subjective activity. In this understanding, since the subjective quality does not arrive from sensuousness, Marx's first thesis contends that "the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism" (6). This results in the consciousness that the 'natural' body was to 'hold together' arriving from non-sensuousness, despite requiring sensuousness for circumscription and form. In this light, the 'natural' body's integrity is entirely false, and the union Feuerbach sought is only the disunion of two irreconcilable elements. The body

in Feuerbach's thought is sensuous, but only as an object, and in its false unity, the body becomes the sensuous object of an abstract activity. Feuerbach's 'natural' body, whose unity and integrity are the product of an ideal or abstract process, can indeed serve as the 'whole' body that is negated by the fragmentation of the worker. Furthermore, Feuerbach's 'natural' body cannot form the 'first fact' as specified by Marx and Engels, for the union between sensuous and abstract experience cannot be found in sensuous experience. Nevertheless, the 'natural' body can, and does, serve Marx's historical materialism; as an idealist point of departure, which, through negation, gives legibility to materialist observations of the present circumstance.

Marx's criticisms in the first and fourth theses can be read to indicate his own revisions to Feuerbach's thought, in which both objective and subjective qualities would arrive from sensuousness. Insofar as the body goes, Feuerbach's 'natural' body would indeed be 'destroyed' by the introduction of sensuous activity. With objective and subjective sensuousness, 'the body' comes to resemble the sense of human corporeal organization, and can form the 'first fact' of historical materialism. If this 'first fact' is discovered to be divided and dividing, fragmented and fragmenting, as Marx does, then the object-body and subject-activity no longer testify to unity, but to the 'cleavages and self contradictions' of that historical moment.

The fragmented corporeal organization, understood as the destruction of an idealized 'whole' body, forming the 'first fact' of a particular moment, and addressing the 'cleavages and self-contradictions' of that moment, further demonstrates the implications of corporeality in Marx's logic of alienation. In Marx's fourth thesis Feuerbach is

positioned as demonstrating that the religious account of the world is a *duplication* arising from a secular world. Marx's criticism is that in doing so, Feuerbach does not recognize that the secular world is also alienated, and that it is this secular alienation that produced the need for a duplicate religious world. Marx presents the religious view as an obstacle to understanding the world, but an obstacle that is a result, and not the cause, of the world's alienation. So long as the divisions within the secular world are not recognized, any attempt to give an account of the world will result in a falsified duplication. This is the status Marx accords Feuerbach's work, which would of course include the 'natural' body. It follows from this that to present a divided world as though it were unified involves producing a duplication *by some means*, be they religious or secular. For while all such alienated and alienating duplications must obscure the lack of coherence in the world they duplicate, not all duplications are of the same quality. Feuerbach's 'nature' is, in Marx's moment, the *product* of abstraction, while commodity fetishism is the form arising from (and subsequently, in denial of) sensuous activity. The abstraction of nature and natural union is no doubt a form of alienation and fetishism to be overcome, but it is not the most pressing in a society dominated by abstract exchange.

Corporeality and fetishism

Marx develops his account of fetishism as describing the means by which a duplicate world is established: either a religious fetish or a secular object that comes to possess the fetish-character. G. A. Cohen, in his *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense*, draws on the language of the fourth thesis in accounting for fetishism:

The explanation of commodity fetishism is that *if elements (here producers) which must be united are initially severed, they come to be joined indirectly on an alienated plane, in illusory forms.*

Division in what needs to be unified *leads to duplication*: a second world arises to confer a surrogate coherence on the fragmented elements. (122)

Feuerbach's 'nature' would be such a 'surrogate coherence', at least as far as the body goes, but Cohen observes that “the commodity form alone connects producing units in a market society” (119). He describes the process in which certain products of labour become commodities by taking on a fetish-character, and can then form the basis for a duplicate world of illusory coherence and connection. Cohen bases this account, in part, on a passage from Marx's *Capital*, which reads:

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses. (Vol. 1, 164-5)

In the process of alienation, the apparatus of industrial production intrudes upon and fragments human corporeal organization. In order to provide an illusory coherence the commodity takes on a social character and appears to offer a form of unity and connection by means of a duplicate world. So even as the sense of a 'whole' body is displaced onto the machine, the fetish-character of the commodity involves the social, subjective aspects of labour being displaced onto its products. The character of social and subjective activity appears as an objective element of the commodity, which arrives as an object-with-subjective-qualities.

Within alienation, fetishism offers, in an illusory way, the coherence that actually lived society cannot. Fetishism also obscures the divisions and self-contradictions of actually lived society, the same divisions that make the duplicate world necessary. Human corporeality is fragmented, by the procedures and specializations of industrial labour, and again by the commodity which takes on the character of social activity; even as it promises connectedness, the commodity fetish dispossesses.

Summary

The 'first fact' of historical materialism directs our attention to the dialectic between human organism and human organization. Within this interaction, bodies or 'the body', much like 'the individual', are an inadequate register to capture the negations and alienation present under capital. I present corporeality, understood in a left-Hegelian tradition, as a means to grapple more adequately with these issues, while also revealing the role corporeality has within the presentation of historical materialism in *The German Ideology*. From this investigation, I emphasize the significance of commodity fetishism in

its capacity to shape both the objective and subjective characters of corporeality: insofar as corporeality is not only collective, but considered as a possible basis for commonality, the connection it offers operates according to the logic of Marxist fetishism, as a duplicate world of illusory wholeness mediated by commodities. This sense of corporeality, with its attention to both the objects and object-forms that intervene in social relations, forms the basis of my discussion in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two - *Mann ist Mann* and Corporeality

In this chapter, I outline an intersection of theatrical representation with the left-Hegelian account of fractured corporeality and fetishism developed in Chapter 1. I locate this discussion within the set of discursive regimes that constitute Bertolt Brecht's *Mann ist Mann*, from which I develop an understanding of his epic theatre in terms of representations of alienated corporeality in text and history.

In addition, I look to *Mann ist Mann* and the discourses associated with it as a means by which to interrogate and rework the corporeality established in Chapter 1. I hope to avoid a reading in which the play is an object to be rendered as an example of my thinking on corporeality. Instead, I understand my approach here as using the framework from Chapter 1 to animate archival accounts of the play, with the expectation that this passage will disturb and revise my outline of corporeality in contact with Brecht's theatrical work. In order to do so, I find myself engaged in a critical historiographic reading on the one hand, and on the other, with a need to establish a discourse on corporeality around my object. This tension is what has shaped my choice of source material, in particular the use of historiographic means and materials to resist the coalescence of an 'authentic' Brecht or essential epic theatre, alongside assembling the fragments necessary to build my corporeal object. I have attempted to render the logic of this methodological tension in the mutual conditioning and pressures that it brings upon the distinct elements of my practice, and it is this commitment that organizes my source material, more than, say, chronology or discipline.

How might the critical corporeality necessary to Brechtian epic practices be elucidated? At a first approach, the question involves negotiating the variety of critical and performance practices subsumed under the name of Brecht, itself a name which has traditionally encompassed and often eclipsed the names of his collaborators,⁷ as these emerge in different times and places. Of course, these accounts are themselves produced through the conflict of imaginations that forms the object 'Brecht'. In this light, I consider the tradition of theatre scholarship that has aimed at establishing the position and significance of *Mann ist Mann* within a larger discourse on 'Brecht,' as well as that which attempts to place the play in relation to various 'influences,' including performers and performance practices. Notable issues in my encounter with these archival materials include the play's contested status within biographical narratives attached to Brecht, and the development of the epic theatre as the play's revisions encompass the variety of dates given for Brecht's uptake of Marx. I conclude with a pair of articles discussing *Mann ist Mann* in terms of the psychotechnical institutions of Weimar Germany, prostheses and performance testing.⁸

Much like the corporeality and history under discussion, no total, unchanging body, nor a total narrative of a body over time, is available in the discourse on Brecht, while a profusion of competing, incomplete accounts remain. It may be that different forces and concerns render these corporealities and histories multiple and incomplete.

⁷ Fredric Jameson, for example, offers an account of this naming in terms of a "Brecht collective" (*Brecht on Method* 10).

⁸ One particular set of sources I have not included nevertheless deserves mention here: these are the model books ("modellbuch") produced by Brecht. As records of and patterns for production, the model books include extensive photographic records of the stage and performers. I have chosen not to involve these sources (or other performance photographs), as these archives consist of images: as representations stemming from representations and aimed at producing further representations, the production, circulation and reception of images increasingly becomes the dominant logic here for a contemporary understanding. This encounter then runs ahead of my discussion of Debord's spectacle, a critical response to which occupies the second half of my dissertation.

However, to account for *Mann ist Mann* involves both historical and corporeal fragments, and confronts the historian with the necessity and impossibility of their re-integration. What is to be made out of these pieces that take their shape from their dis-integration? In approaching this matter for my project here, I imagine something like a modern Prometheus' creation: from pieces of text, author and character, I will assemble a Brechtian body. Something will surely be lost in the process.

***Mann ist Mann* as catalog of corporeal pieces**

This evening you'll see a man reassembled like a car,

Without his losing anything by it.

– *Mann ist Mann*, qtd and trans in Doherty, 455.

In offering a brief account of the play, I refer here to the 1954 version of the text presented by Willett and Manheim in volume 2, part 1, of their collection of Brecht's *Plays*. The precise status of this version, as well as a number of other revisions of *Mann ist Mann*, will be dealt with below.

Mann ist Mann focuses on the conversion of Galy Gay, a humble porter, into Jeraiah Jip, a member of the British colonial forces in India. The need to produce such a soldier arises when a British machine gun squad, in the process of robbing a temple for beer money, lose a member of their squad. This soldier, Jeraiah Jip, loses 'four ounces' of hair and scalp to a trap in the temple. He is thus unable to report for roll-call, as he needs to recover from his injury, and the missing hair marks him, and by extension, his squad, as the criminals responsible for the robbery.

The other soldiers plan to return with scissors, as removing the rest of Jip's hair will erase the missing patch: in the meantime, they take Jip's paybook with them. Here,

the lump of hair and flesh, mediated through the institution of military justice, is a means to identify an otherwise unknown criminal. This type of identification, that ties a particular body to a specific time and place, is unlike that of the paybook. The particular credibility given to possession of the paybook is based in the understanding that no soldier would be without it. More so than any other aspect of his equipment, his paybook is crucial to his survival, and hence testifies to his identity. The loss of Jip's hair, which threatens to condemn the entire squad, is remedied by the transfer of his paybook, which could allow for some other whole, undamaged body to answer for Jeraiah Jip at roll-call.

The squad meets Galy Gay, a man 'who can't say no,' and convince him to serve as Jip's stand in. This begins the 're-assembly' of the epigraph above, in which the interchangeability and disposability of the soldier is cast in terms of the labourer on an assembly line.

Galy Gay is dressed in a uniform too small for him, given Jip's paybook, and taught to answer to the name of Jeraiah Jip. At this point, Galy Gay is able to pass as Jip while remaining fully aware that this is a role he is playing. Yet when the squad is later unable to recover Jip, they turn to Gay to provide a more permanent replacement. Gay resists, and the squad plans to entrap him in a crime so that "he will surely think it better to be Jeraiah Jip, a soldier proceeding to the northern frontier, than Galy Gay, a criminal with some chance of actually being shot" (40).

The scenario the soldiers create plays out as a sequence of 'turns,' short scenes with introductions addressed directly to the audience. In the first of these, the squad conspires to place Gay as the broker for the illegal sale of a 'Military surplus elephant'.

The elephant, 'Billy Humph,' is composed of two soldiers hiding under a map, holding up a stuffed elephant head, with a bottle of water with which to simulate the animal's urination. This ramshackle collection of pieces takes on its corporeal identity and integrity by force of its role in economic exchange: "He'll take it for an elephant all right, let me tell you. He'd take this beer bottle for an elephant if somebody points at it and says: I want to buy that elephant" (40). As soon as the trap is sprung and the deal dissolves, the elephant falls to pieces.

Nevertheless, the plan proceeds and Gay is put on trial, convicted of selling a false elephant, and sentenced to death. Gay denies that he is the Galy Gay identified by the court: without disputing the evidence or verdict, he instead insists that he is not the man named. In order to distance himself from the doomed Galy Gay, Galy Gay shaves off his mustache. This recalls Jip's loss of hair that connected him to a crime, as Gay tries to escape a crime by losing hair. However, the missing mustache is presented as evidence of a guilty conscience, returning to connect Galy Gay to the criminal Galy Gay. The forth turn acts out the (mock) execution, which culminates in Gay fainting. When he recovers, he is addressed as Jeraiah Jip and made to give the funeral address for the now deceased Galy Gay. In preparing to give this eulogy, Gay enters into a monologue, which reads in part:

By what sign does Galy Gay know himself

To be Galy Gay?

Suppose his arm was cut off

And he found it in the chink of a wall

Would Galy Gay's eye know Galy Gay's arm

And Galy Gay's foot cry out: This is the one!? (61)

He concludes that such a recognition is meaningless, for “if Galy Gay were not Galy Gay” then he would be someone else, recognizing himself in some other, contingent, changeable fashion (61). He delivers the eulogy and departs with the soldiers.

On their way north to the front, the squad despairs, as Gay's transformation has not entirely stuck. Their sergeant intervenes, proceeding to castrate himself with his pistol, so that “[n]o girl in this world will ever cost me a penny again” (69). Gay tries to stop him, warning that “[a] name is an uncertain thing, you can't build on it” (69). As soon as the deed is done, Gay realizes “where such stubbornness gets you and what a bloody thing it is when a man is never satisfied with himself and makes so much fuss about his name” (69). Gay now surrenders his old name and identity eagerly.

The play concludes with the former Jeraiah Jip returning and his old squad mates refusing to acknowledge him. Gay/Jip gives Galy Gay's old papers to Jip, and completes his transformation into a “human fighting machine” by firing upon and destroying a fortress (75).

Mann ist Mann as text

This particular collection of scraps and chunks, of hair and flesh, of eyes and hands and feet, uniforms and paybooks, identities and stuffed elephant heads, arrive from a variety of texts with a number of names. First published and performed in 1926, and attributed to Bertolt Brecht, Emil Burri, Slatan Dudow, Elisabeth Hauptmann, Casper Neher, and Bernhard Reich, the titles of the play under consideration include *Mann = Mann*, or *Mann ist Mann: Die Verwandlung des Packers Galy Gay in den Militärbaracken von Kilkoa im Jahre Neunzehnhundertfünfundzwanzig*. Translations

into English include *A Man's a Man* (for example, by Eric Bentley in 1961 and again in 1964), or *Man Equals Man* (e.g. Gerhard Neillhaus', as discussed below).

Following from the first publication and première in 1926, without aiming at a comprehensive account, revisions and reworkings of *Mann ist Mann* include a radio version in 1927, publication of a revised text in 1928, a revision for the stage in 1930 and again in 1931, and publication again in 1934 and 1938. In addition to these, John Willett and Ralph Manheim present their version as sourced from what they tentatively term “the 'final' text,” found in Brecht's notes from 1953-54 (*Plays* Vol 2.1 xvii). The 'finality' of this text is attributed to Brecht's death, and does not include, for example, the version staged by the Berliner Ensemble in 1967. Willett and Manheim, in connecting Brecht's death to the finality of this text, invoke an individualized understanding of authorship.

Willett and Manheim's 1979 introduction to the play includes a detailed account attempting to trace the origins and development of *Mann ist Mann*. After discussing numerous revisions and edits over more than three decades, they conclude: “to say the least, what we have now before us is an extremely inconsistent work” (*Plays* Vol 2.1 xv). This 'inconsistency,' then, is in terms of the text's production, such that the 'finished' script is composed of pieces written at different times and for different purposes, pieces that have been rearranged and rewritten, cut and restored. Willett and Manheim find the 'inconsistent' construction to be obstacle to a comprehensive understanding: lacking a unified “line,” the play:

[...] is more a tangle of threads, each starting at a different point in the playwright's own evolution and each leading in a different direction. (xvi)

Here, lacking a unitary or exclusive approach to the text, Willett and Manheim map the play onto fragments of Brecht's presumably less 'inconsistent' biography. Like tracing crisscrossing footprints in the earth, the play is presented as the outcome of Brecht's many passings. The editors' goal then is to provide enough supporting or related texts “to let the reader follow the way in which Brecht pieced it together over the years” (xvii). *Mann ist Mann*, in its 'final' form, appears to be something akin to a Ship of Theseus. The mode of reading proposed by Willett and Manheim is aimed at the scars and seams that hold the body of the play together, a tracing of the work of a piecemeal artist. Having begun a study of the play's patchwork construction, Willett and Manheim suggest a connection between the history of its construction and the structure and content of the play:

Even more than his other works, this play is a montage, the notion of montage indeed being its *liet-motiv*, determining not only its structure (particularly in the 'numbers' or 'turns' of scene 9) but also its treatment of the main character. (xvii)

This sentence stands alone in their introduction, which offers no further insight into the sense of 'montage' being discussed.

Against the notion of a singularized montage, or perhaps a straightforward invocation of Sergei Eisenstein's work, whose name is often linked with Brecht's on this basis, Roswitha Mueller's 1987 “Montage in Brecht” positions Brecht's use of that

technique in tension with Eisenstein's deployment. This is part of her critical encounter with a discourse on Brecht in which “the term montage has been used all too often as a kind of magic formula to bridge the gap between different media, genres, and authors” (473). She argues for an understanding of Brechtian montage that shifts throughout Brecht's career, changed in particular by his exposure to the film industries of America and Germany and his acute awareness of the different montages available in the mediums of film and theatre. Mueller's argument opens the possibility of a number of different understandings of montage being applied to *Mann ist Mann* at different times, and with this in mind, the suggestion of 'montage' tends to further ramify the 'inconsistency' of the play's production.

In any case, it does not seem that Willett and Manheim intend to suggest a historical influence of 'montage,' but a contemporary means by which to link the play's history to the play's structure. Further, this linkage serves to provide, if not a unitary 'line,' then at least a 'liet-motiv' (here I follow Willett and Manheim's usage), a recurring element that serves as a guide of sorts, offering something in the way of consistency that their account of the play's creation lacks. However, for Willett and Manheim to position montage as a liet-motiv is a curious formation: both are conventions for making connections, yet the one operates by repetition and variation, the other by difference. A liet-motiv of montage seems to suggest a recurrent discontinuity, or perhaps the repeating of a splitting. This recalls the sense of the epigraph to this chapter, which, in the Gerhard Nellhaus translation that Willett and Manheim address, proceeds:

Tonight you are going to see a man reassembled like a car

Leaving all his individual components just as they are. (38)

If, as Willett and Manheim suggest, the 'treatment of the main character' does indeed proceed according the logic of montage, then the process of reassembly is not a continuous development, but broken up into pieces, just as the 'turns' of the play are. Further, this process then turns upon these pieces, these 'individual components'. Such a reading of the play finds the individuality of these components denying the integrity and individuality of Galy Gay. In this sense, to be 'inconsistent' is an objective for the play, and not an obstacle: the individual is broken up, as a 'liet-motiv,' over and again, into more elemental forms. Unlike the play, which is rewritten, cut, restored, reassembled, given different titles and translated, then historiographically reduced to a single play, a single identity, Galy Gay changes identity with all his pieces 'just as they are'.

If Willett and Manheim's approach proceeds with the 'final' form of *Mann ist Mann* as its aim and object, Rodney Mantle's discussion of the play's provenance in his "Bertolt Brecht's *Galgei*" is altogether different. Mantle's article is, in part, a response to Ernst Schumacher's account of Brecht's work. Schumacher published *Die Dramatischen Versuche Bertolt Brechts 1918-1933* in 1955, in which he presented Brecht's 'early' work as a steady progression towards Marxist thought, and *Mann ist Mann* as one step upon this journey. In 1971, Mantle inveighed against Schumacher's reading on the basis of a recovered part of Brecht's 1918 *Galgei*. Mantle traces the lineage of *Mann ist Mann* from this text, which has a plot that resembles that of *Mann ist Mann*, and its revisions, which change the main character's name from Galgei to Galy Gay. On this basis, he concludes that Schumacher neglects "Brecht's habit of constantly rewriting his plays," and is consequently "misled by the assumption that the play was first conceived in 1924-25, whereas this was merely a rewriting of an earlier work" (*Bertolt Brecht's*

“*Galgei*” 384). There appears to be a tension here: on the one hand, Mantle chides Schumacher for overlooking Brecht's process of revision, while on the other, Mantle dismisses the 1924-25 version as 'merely a rewriting'. However, insofar as Mantle's concern is with Brecht's 'early' works, this appears to drive him towards 'earlier' versions, towards a source or origin. So it is that by virtue of his attention to Brecht's revisions he is able to distinguish the desired 'early' work and to dismiss later versions as 'merely a rewriting'. As this chronology recedes from Brecht's interest in Marx, Mantle argues that *Galgei*, and subsequently *Mann ist Mann*, are the product of a Brecht whose “main concern was an (apolitical) investigation of the nature of the human personality,” one that was “not socio-economic, but psychological” (384). Mantle's intervention thus positions this 'early' play and its playwright in contrast to the 'later,' politicized, socio-economic Brecht.

Despite his 'apolitical' and 'psychological' reading, Mantle does not disable all senses of critical engagement in the work, although he does restrict them to aesthetic rebuttals:

It is also probable that *Galgei*, like *Baal*, is essentially a literary refutation. [...] the metamorphosis of *Galgei* should almost certainly be seen as a refutation of the idealistic concept of man found in such Expressionist plays as Ernst Toller's *Die Wandlung*, which was written shortly before it. (384)

Here, Mantle limits the possible significance of *Galgei* to an ongoing 'literary' debate over differing conceptions of man and personality. Even if this were to be mapped onto Brecht's writing on theatre and his refusal of a psychological individuality as the object

of his work, it does so in a register of a literary disputation, not an imminent critical encounter with social reality.

Mantle's intervention, arguing against Schumacher's account, involves a number of contentious claims and procedures shaping the discourse '*Mann ist Mann*'. These include the means by which to revise historical narratives in the light of new evidence, the means by which revisions of a play are to be dismissed in the light of that same evidence, and reinforcing the discursive category 'early,' as a means to organize both play and playwright. Mantle's engagement with these practices, particularly his privileging of an 'early' work over subsequent revisions, such that the play is read in terms of its 'earliest' identified version, serves to remove any critical force or insight from *Galgei*, and hence from *Mann ist Mann*, except that of an apolitical entry in an aesthetic debate over psychology. This removes Brecht's work to a time before any Marxist influence need be identified or dealt with.

Brecht across *Mann ist Mann*

The ongoing critical contestation shaping the reception and understanding of *Mann ist Mann* frequently involves appeals to a Brecht who is (often) 'early' and (occasionally) 'late'. Within the various elements of his life subjected to this bifurcation, the theme of Brecht's uptake of Marxist thought looms large. Of course, the particular significance for *Mann ist Mann* and the division between Brechts 'early' and 'late' turns on a matter of timing. *Mann ist Mann* was first published and performed in 1926, and this is the same year that Elizabeth Hauptmann, Brecht's longtime collaborator, first indicated in her journals that Brecht had become interested in Marxist thought. However, this date is hardly uncontested as an origin for Brecht's interest in Marx: for

example, in his *Bertolt Brecht and Critical Theory*, Steve Giles casts doubt on Hauptmann's account, arguing that “the first clear indication of Brecht's interest in Marxist theory may be found in a letter to Helene Weigel in August 1927” (9). Giles also notes that R.C. Spiers' *Brecht's Early Works* maintains that despite his earlier interest, Brecht only accepted Marxism in 1929, while Werner Hecht argues it is not until 1932 that Brecht came to practice as a Marxist (9-10). Giles' project involves sorting through these varied claims, their conceptions of Marxist thought and accounts of Brecht's work, in order to place the playwright in a network of relations to philosophical trends.

Despite those practices which attempt to secure a vision of the play untroubled by Marxist thought, perhaps in the very earliest fragments of *Galgei*, or even the sketches in notebooks that preceded these, during the period of its first publication and performance, and the years following, I find multiple, overlapping, contradictory accounts for the Brechts of *Mann ist Mann*. An aporia then, like a changing screen, behind which an old, early Brecht is being reassembled, given a new coat of paint, and driven off as the new, late Brecht.

***Mann ist Mann* as epic theatre**

The contestations surrounding Brecht's intersection with Marxist thought from 1926 through 1932 should not obscure Brecht's other critical projects during this time, particularly the development and practice of the epic theatre during this period. Here, Brecht's notes to *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* from 1930, find him engaged with a tradition of opera that has inherited something of Wagner's

Gesamtkunstwerk:

So long as the expression '*Gesamtkunstwerk*' (or 'integrated work of art') means that the integration is a macédoine, so long as the arts are supposed to be 'fused' together, the various elements will all be equally degraded and each will act as a mere 'feed' to the rest. The process of fusion extends to the spectator, who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art. (*Plays* Vol 2.3 89)

The “culinary” metaphor that runs through this passage, from the 'macédoine,' literally a mixed salad, with a connotation of 'medley,' to the potted spectator, is attached to the consumable, “hedonistic” and “irrational” opera that Brecht wishes to turn against itself (88). The understanding of *Gesamtkunstwerk* presented here is the exemplar of the culinary, an undistinguished mixing, integrating and fusing that is to the detriment of all its elements. Against this, Brecht identifies a number of innovations that the epic theatre is to bring to opera, and first amongst them is a type of disassembly: “When the epic theatre's methods begin to penetrate the opera the first result is a radical *separation of the elements*” (89). In the same passage, Brecht identifies 'words,' 'music' and 'setting' as a few of the elements to be disentangled, but this list should not be taken as exhaustive. For example, in his introduction to the prompt-book for *Mahagonny*, Kurt Weill offers his understanding of music in relation to other aspects of the work:

The music in question does not further the plot; each entrance of the music, rather, amounts to an interruption of the plot. The epic form of theatre is a step-by-step juxtaposition of situations. (92)

Here, not only does Weill present 'plot' as disjunct from music, as another element to be separated out from the 'total work,' but he identifies 'interruption' and 'juxtaposition' as important techniques for the epic form. These procedures are suppressed by the fusing and integrating 'total work,' while the 'separation of elements' allows for an increasing variety and nuance with the more elements made separate.

How does the separation of elements extend to the actor? Or more specifically, to corporeality on stage? A suggestive passage can be found in Walter Benjamin's "What is Epic Theatre?" The well-known version of this text was first published in 1939, although an earlier draft of the essay also exists, unpublished until 1966. While both versions discuss *Mann ist Mann*, the earlier version finds Benjamin putting far more emphasis on the play, as well as its performance in Berlin in 1931, holding it to be "a model of epic theatre, the only one so far" (*Understanding Brecht* 3). In both versions, Benjamin quotes Brecht at length about the epic theatre's demands on the actor. In the earlier version Benjamin expressly associates this discussion with *Mann ist Mann*, while in the later version, despite the quote from Brecht remaining unchanged, Benjamin elides the context, while offering his own further development of the ideas expressed. Here I quote the later version:

Brecht wrote: "The actor must show his subject, and he must show himself. Of course, he shows his subject by showing himself, and he shows himself by showing his subject. Although the two coincide, they must not coincide in such a way that the difference between the two tasks disappears." In other words: an actor should reserve for himself the possibility of stepping out of character

artistically. At the proper moment, he should insist on portraying a man who reflects about his part. (*Illuminations* 153)

Here the sense of elements being separated continues, but the logic is not of the same character as that of detaching music, words, or setting from a totality and placing them in juxtaposition. The actor, with both subject and self, arrives already divided, but this division is not one of complete separation. The 'two tasks,' considered as subjective activities, are presented as being at risk of coinciding in a destructive fashion, becoming singular, such that difference between them is no longer legible. Guarding against this unwelcome coincidence is an act of interruption, such that the actor 'steps out of character' in order to reflect upon, and juxtapose their being with, their role.⁹ However, is the destructive coincidence or singularity that threatens the epic actor the Wagnerian totality that the epic theatre addresses? Certainly, a 'singular performer,' in which no separation between self and subject can be discerned, may very well be a part of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* approach to performance. In this light, it would be entirely appropriate for the epic theatre, as discussed above, to separate out these particular 'elements' as it would any other. However, in Brecht's telling of it, where showing the subject cannot help but involve the self, and vice versa, these two tasks are linked by something other than a 'Wagnerian' integration or fusion. What if the totality in which the actor's self and subject are bound up is not that of the total work, but that of the presumably singular individual?

⁹ Patrice Pavis gives a somewhat similar account of epic performance under the rubric of 'gestus'. However, Pavis' approach is semiological, emphasizing the actor's appearance and reception by the audience, rather than a consideration of corporeality. See, for example, Pavis' *Languages of the Stage: Essays in the Semiology of the Theatre*.

If *Mann ist Mann*, perhaps in its 'later' forms, is thought of as epic theatre, then the dis- and re-assembly of Galy Gay into Jeraiah Jip would constitute the actor's 'subject'. Of course, the actor's 'self' will also be present, and these two tasks will place different demands on the capacities and dexterities of the performer. Divided by the action of the play as well as the fact of it being a play, these two tasks are, as Brecht suggests, not fully separable. For example, the interruption of Galy Gay's activity by the performer may well contribute to the continuity of the disassembly of Galy Gay. Nor are the 'two tasks' open to a simple unification: the 'individual parts' of the character are not reducible to the actor or the actor's parts. This suggests the 'two tasks' are a contradiction, in a historical materialist sense of that term.

Consideration of Galy Gay in terms of contradiction has produced a number of critical responses. Benjamin makes much of this in "What is Epic Theatre?", where, in the 1939 version of this essay, he positions Galy Gay as the most recent emergence of the 'untragic hero' in a tradition stemming from Plato on:

We may go further and say that Brecht has attempted to make the thinking man, or indeed the wise man, into an actual dramatic hero. [...] The attempt is carried furthest in the character of Galy Gay the packer. Galy Gay, the hero of the play *A Man's a Man*, is himself like an empty stage on which the contradictions of our society are acted out. Following Brecht's line of thought, one might even arrive at the proposition that it is the wise man who, in this sense, is the perfect empty stage. In any case Galy Gay is a wise man.

(*Understanding Brecht* 17)

Here, Benjamin uses his reading of the play in furtherance of his explication and thematizing ('The Relaxed Audience,' 'The Untragic Hero,' 'The Didactic Play,' &c) of Brecht's work more generally. However, the previously discussed early draft of "What is Epic Theatre?" lacks the categorical approach of the later revision while placing a larger emphasis on *Mann ist Mann*. The above passage appears in a similar form in the earlier version, but continues with a sustained discussion of the play and the character of Galy Gay, which in part reads:

Yet he is introduced as a man 'who can't say no'. And this too is wise, for he lets the contradictions of existence enter into the only place where they can, in the last analysis, be resolved: the life of a man. Only the 'consenting' man has any chance of changing the world. (8-9)

Rather than speculate on Benjamin's reasons for subsequently editing this passage out of the published draft, I would instead wish to draw attention to the reinforcing of the notion that the contradictions Galy Gay encounters do not arrive from 'within' the character. Galy Gay is, at least initially, like an 'empty stage,' and this is his 'wisdom'. His emptiness serves to prepare him to receive the contradictions his existence forces upon him.

This sense of the 'empty stage,' as an understanding of a character's readiness to consent, should not be confused with Peter Brook's 'the empty space'. Brook's term, developed in the eponymous book, describes a minimum condition of theatrical activity: an "empty space" to serve as a "bare stage" and one person to pass through this space while another watches. (*The Empty Space* 11) Certainly, Brook attributes much to

Brecht, holding him to be “the key figure of our time,” (80) and even ending *The Empty Space* by asserting “A play is a play” (157). Nevertheless, this is an affirmative assertion and a play on the dual meanings of 'play,' quite unrelated to Brecht's project. Brook's work explicitly contrasts the 'empty space' to a declining commercial theatre and its trappings, aiming to distance his understanding of theatrical practice from the fate of these theatrical institutions. Not only are these concerns foreign to Benjamin's account, but Brook's 'empty space' is the precondition for a 'bare stage': for the epic actor, the 'empty stage' is complicated from before the first moment of performance by the actor's two tasks, the self and the subject.

The 'wise man' like an 'empty stage,' suffices then, at least at the outset, for the character of Galy Gay. However, the actor must know enough, at the very least, to be able to step out of the 'empty stage' and reflect upon it. This type of contradiction in the actor's role does not arrive from the actor's internality: rather it is the very idea of the 'empty stage' in the epic theatre that produces the contradiction imminent to the two tasks.

In this light, allow me to consider Raymond Williams' treatment of a form appropriate to Brecht's work. In *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, Williams, whose discussion focuses on Brecht's later plays, suggests 'open' as a preferable term to 'epic' (278). To see this “open action,”

[...] the sequence of scenes which are “for themselves”, [...] is to see what can appear an unstudied form: a mere series: a setting-down of scenes. But what has gone, from the ordinary shape of most modern plays, is more noticeable, as we look closer. What

has gone is a form that encloses the characters, in fixed places and at fixed times. (288)

With this 'enclosure' removed, Williams finds the 'open' theatre is “undominated by fixed scene and persistent situations,” becoming “basically a movement corresponding to a flow of action – a process rather than a product” (289). With this analysis of the 'open' theatre's form, Williams connects two aspects of Brecht's work: his understanding of Marxist thought and his formal innovation in theatre. This is a familiar connection in the scholarship on Brecht, between a historical materialist *history* and the *structure* of Brecht's plays. However, I wish to explore the 'open' theatre's openness more closely.

The 'enclosure' to be removed that Williams describes involves a fixity of place, time and scene. These, along with 'persistent situations,' are provided to characters who reside within this enclosure, and are denied to those of the 'open' theatre. However, the 'open' character, whose being is without stable reference to continuity of time, situation or place, lacks a minimally stable historical background upon which to recognize themselves and to be recognized. Williams directs us to an alternative point of reference, as he contends that the 'open' form, shorn of the enclosure of fixed scene and action, suits the structure of feeling in Brecht's work 'exactly':

Brecht's drama is that of isolated and separated individuals, and of their connections, in that capacity, with a total historical process.
(289)

He does not substantially elaborate on his understanding of 'total historical process' here. However, when Williams considers the 'open' theatre through the frame of

expressionism, and its “characteristic poles,” “the isolated individual” and “the totality of the world in which he suffers,” he offers the following:

[...] the source of values and explanation, is at the other pole: the totality, the historical process. The strength of his form is that it permits this kind of clarification: at once clipped, bitter, distant, and yet, in its assumption of a common complicity, a common weakness, connecting and humane in very general ways [...] (289)

On one hand, Williams' usage here recalls the sense of 'totality' as developed by György Lukács. Lukács applied his understanding of a 'totality of social relations' to his criticism of literature and modern art, such that he argued for a particular form of realism as the only aesthetic practice adequate to address the 'objective realities' of capitalism and revolution. If Williams' 'total' and 'totality' above are indeed in the Lukácsian sense, then this application of the term to Brecht's work is potentially problematic. If nothing else, such a usage obscures the disagreement the two authors had over the appropriate form for contemporary art, a disagreement that turned in no small part over their conflicting understandings of realism and totality.

On the other hand, given the concerns and framing of my project, I wonder if Williams' analysis of Brecht's work is not better suited to an understanding of fetishism, rather than 'objective reality'. The fetishism of the commodity is emphatically not a 'total historical process,' but a means by which alienation is obscured, diverted and ultimately reinforced. Nevertheless, by offering a social connection to otherwise isolated persons, a Marxist fetishism appears to offer a totality, both as a social connection to others and as a completion or integrity of an individual: that is, the fetish-

character is *totalizing*, rather than total. So when Williams' writes of a 'complicity' and 'weakness' felt as 'common,' and that these are 'connecting and humane in very general ways,' I find it difficult to imagine these are the outcomes of an encounter with the total historical process of capitalism. However, an entirely general connection between isolated individuals, based in a common sense of weakness and complicity, might serve as a fine account of a Marxist fetishism, omitting only the mediation of commodities. This understanding of the 'open' theatre would not require characters of the play to encounter and address 'objective realities,' but would find them in contact with one another only through the mediation of a totalizing fetishism, which appears to offer connection and wholeness. The removal of the 'enclosure' Williams describes allows for this alienated/alienating relation to become the organizing structure of the 'open' theatre, but of course, neither Brecht's theatre nor a Marxist analysis of the fetish-character are directed at confirming these outcomes, but rather on the recognition of their falsity. Here, the estrangement of the actor's role, along with the other elements of the epic theatre, addresses the alienation presented in the structure of the work in a critical fashion, so that a performance in the epic theatre engages with, and alters, the structure of an epic play. Notably, the case of the epic actor involves the engagement with alienation and fragmentation through an estranging splitting: the epic theatre presents the divided individual, who is cut off from others and themselves, by means of the two tasks of the actor.

These two species of division, of the alienated individual and the estranging actor, have a particular relation to the enclosure of fixed time and place. However, the estrangement of the actor's two tasks does not share the same logic of openness by

doing away with this enclosure, for as the actor 'steps out of character,' it is this very same enclosure that is stepped over or out of: the two tasks of the actor address both the inside and outside of this 'enclosure'. The sense of 'stepping' in and out should not be lightly dismissed here, as such a shift is a corporeal one.

While the visibility of alienation in the open theatre requires escaping the 'enclosure,' which can only serve to obscure the relations in question, the actor's two tasks would appear to require it, or perhaps, produce it, in an ongoing fashion. The demands of the inter-scenic structure Williams describes need not be understood as incompatible with those of the two tasks. Rather, the enclosure of fixed time and scene could very well be established and violated a number of times in the course of a scene without coming to organize the procession of one scene to the next. Additionally, insofar as the form of 'open' theatre depends on the absence of this enclosure, the manipulations of this enclosure by the actor's two tasks suggests an avenue through which the epic actor's activities can come to operate upon the formal aspects of an epic play.

Perhaps a tendency can be discerned here, within the criticism on Brecht, placing a particular emphasis on the fluid and changeable, as in the 'movement' or 'flow of action' that Williams describes, a 'process' in favor of a 'product'. This theme is elaborated on by Bert Cardullo in his "A World In Transition: A Study of Brecht's *Mann ist Mann*." Cardullo makes a connection between the play and the picaresque, seeing a comic roguishness in common between the picaro, who "adapts himself to a corrupt world" and Galy Gay's malleability (266). Through this connection Cardullo expands upon Benjamin's discussion of the 'wise man,' contrasting the tragic hero, who

gains a transcendent knowledge only at the moment of death or destruction, with the untragic picaro, who uses worldly knowledge to survive (265-6). He argues that it is the particularities of this 'type' of comic character that informs the 'success' of *Mann ist Mann* amongst Brecht's works:

[...] we do not demand the individuality, the private psychology, from its comic grotesques that we seem to demand from the characters in subsequent, "straighter" plays [...] (273)

Through this comic figuration, Cardullo not only associates his reading of *Mann ist Mann* with a tradition of reading Brecht's works that disavows psychic interiority, but he positions the play as perhaps the finest example of this approach in Brecht's oeuvre, as the

[...] comic characters of *Mann ist Mann*, and of the equally undervalued later play *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti*, are in fact closer to the ideal of Brecht's epic theatre than the majority of characters in the two parable plays. (273)

The 'parable plays' referred to here are, of course, *The Good Person of Szechwan* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. However Cardullo also observes a change in Brecht's account of *Mann ist Mann*: when first published and performed in 1926, Brecht described the play as a 'comedy,' while by 1931 it had become a 'parable' (273). This transition from comedy to parable is not the only shift in genre Cardullo notes. He draws attention to a similar process in the course of *Mann ist Mann*:

The play calls itself a comedy, but it changes right before our eyes. If man can change fundamentally and can change the world, then

the dramatic form that represents him must necessarily change, too.

It cannot be solely comic, nor can it be solely tragic. (272)

Cardullo likens the dis- and re- assembly of Galy Gay to the formal concerns of *Mann ist Mann*: as the character goes, so goes the play. If the 'naïve wisdom' of the untragic hero suffices at the outset, it will not remain so, and the play, if initially presented as a comedy, cannot conclude as such. However, Cardullo restricts himself here to the received categories of comedy and tragedy. His efforts to account for the play within these traditional narrative forms finds him suggesting that *Mann ist Mann* is the agent of a positive synthesis:

Mann ist Mann is neither a tragedy nor a comedy. It has altered the nature of both to become something else, a form that combines to a new end the best feature of each: profound knowledge and abiding life, wrenching change and sure survival. (272)

Without precisely naming this 'new end,' Cardullo nevertheless rejects the category 'tragicomic,' as it takes up the "worst features of tragedy and comedy," and suggests a modification of the grotesque as a means for understanding *Mann ist Mann* (272).

Rather than attempting to discern the correct initial and concluding genres for the play, I am struck by the process Cardullo's account testifies to, in which *Mann ist Mann's* internal logic drives alterations to the play as it unfolds.¹⁰ For example, Cardullo's reading of *Mann ist Mann* sees not only a play whose logic alters itself, but a character with an apparently unlimited capacity for further alteration:

¹⁰ James Lyon's 1994 "Brecht's *Mann ist Mann* and the Death of Tragedy in the 20th Century" makes a similar argument in connection to *Mann ist Mann*. Lyon contends that Brecht employs "both structure and content of the play to pronounce a death sentence on what he considered to be this outmoded theatrical genre" (514).

We cannot identify with a fixed and unified, three-dimensional Galy Gay, one who could never change from the murderer that he becomes. [...] Galy Gay, Brecht has shown us, is eminently changeable, so there is no reason to believe that he will remain a murderous soldier: the very nature of the play as well as his character contradicts this idea. (272-3)

Cardullo extends his argument here, as he presents the course of the play as being intimately bound up with the course of the character. He asserts that because *Mann ist Mann* and Galy Gay are presented as changeable, and have indeed changed 'before our eyes,' they will continue to do so. This constant malleability is their 'very nature,' and hence, presumably fixed. What is more, Cardullo positions Galy Gay as no mere man amongst men, or the equal of any other, but 'eminently changeable,' and this distinguished quality ensures he will escape the unfortunate circumstance of his military service. Taken to the limit, perhaps this reading would find that the merit and even agency of changeability belongs to Galy Gay, as it presumably belongs to *Mann ist Mann*, a play that changes itself in performance. However, the epigraph to my chapter, as found in *A Man's a Man* translated by Eric Bentley, suggests an alternate account:

Take him apart like a car, rebuild him bit by bit -

As you will see, he has nothing to lose by it. (160)

The sense here is not of Gay's specific capacity for change, but *that he is changed*.¹¹ The dis- and re- assembly of Gay is a process, no doubt, but one aimed at, and resulting in, a product. Gay is made to depart from one specific individuality and to return to a different one. This is an action applied to, and not originating from, Galy Gay. His existence, as a character, is not one in which changeability appears as a personal virtue. Even those who endeavor to change him do not do so in order celebrate a remarkable malleability, but to produce the resulting identity they require.

The inter-scenic structure of the open theatre may be, as in Williams account, more akin to a process than a product, and the two tasks of the epic actor might involve stepping in and out of character many times within a single scene, but the character of Galy Gay and Jeraiah Jip interacts with the 'enclosure' of fixed time and scene in a different way. Both Galy Gay and Jeraiah Jip are individualities, even if the Jip that Gay becomes is not the Jip that was lost. These individualities, presented in their contingent production and reception, nevertheless testify to their integrity and identity: they address and recognize fixity, despite the procedures of the open theatre and the epic actor. This contradiction is what permits Bertolt Brecht to say 'a man's a man': despite the demonstrated exchangeability and interchangeability of Galy Gay/Jeraiah Jip, these two subjects know themselves as individuals.

¹¹ Margaret Setje-Eilers' 2008 "A Man's a Man, but What about Woman?" offers an analysis of this issue in terms of gendered roles and spaces. She examines the character of Widow Leokadja Begbick, a canteen owner who travels with the military. She positions Begbick as a figure "relatively unchanged" by the events of the play, to the degree that "her unwavering role also stands out conspicuously against the other characters' altered identities" (97-8). In contrast to Cardullo's argument, Setje-Eilers argues that it is Begbick's capacity for adaptation that leaves her largely unscathed, while Gay is the victim of an enforced transformation and "remains a clueless coward who only becomes strong in a group" (101).

My analysis of the open theatre here involves three different relations to the enclosure of continuous action and fixed time and space, those of character, actor and inter-scenic structure. Through the interplay of these, *Mann ist Mann* demonstrates that the sense of an individual's integrity or indivisibility is contingent, subject to social institutions. This does not destroy the concept or practice of individuality, even within the logic of the play, but it does demonstrate that it cannot be as it appears: individuality does not operate according to the logic it professes.

Extending this discussion to the audience, the 'enclosure' of fixity which appears to guarantee a stability by which to recognize oneself, while denied to the characters, is in place around the audience: Without reference to some form of individuation, the dis- and re- assembly of Galy Gay cannot register as an intervention in the practices that constitute individuality.

This critical movement of an epic theatre, if *Mann ist Mann* may be understood in those terms, is one in which an established form, be it individuality, or tragedy and comedy, is entered into in order to turn it against itself. Beginning in a familiar fashion in order to arrive elsewhere, this process of *estrangement* of form accords with the logic of the play that reshapes itself and its audience.

***Mann ist Mann* and clown corporealities**

In keeping with a sense of the untragic hero's 'naïve wisdom,' critics looking to find artistic antecedents informing the production of *Mann ist Mann* have, in a number of cases, looked to clowns or comic figures. One well known example is the musical clown Karl Valentin. Denis Calandra's 1974 "Karl Valentin and Bertolt Brecht" frames the interaction between the two as "the important role Valentin played in Brecht's

formative years” (87). Calandra goes on to detail a number of Valentin's pieces from the period prior to 1924, during which Brecht and Valentin were both in Munich. However, even after Brecht departs for Berlin, Calandra continues to discern Valentin's influence on Brecht: “Looking closely at Brecht's arrangements as a director in the 1931 *Mann ist Mann* (written between 1924 and 1926) one cannot help but recognize Valentin's stage pictures” (91).

Joel Schechter builds on Calandra's account of Valentin and *Mann ist Mann*, adding Charlie Chaplin in his “Brecht's Clowns: *Man is Man* and after.” Here, Valentin and Chaplin are positioned as those who led Brecht “to invent stage characters who could be described as political clowns,” of which Galy Gay is the prototype (68).

These two articles rely on a particular species of association, identifying definite historical moments and references that link their subjects and then suggesting avenues of influence. For example, both Calandra and Schechter note that Brecht credits Valentin with inspiring the epic theatre in 1924: as Brecht tells this story, Valentin suggested that he depict terrified soldiers through white-face in a production of Marlowe's *Edward II*. Much of the extensive account of Valentin and Brecht in Calandra's piece has this quality, of a descriptive historical interaction or anecdote.

Schechter, while also relying on this descriptive form, additionally reads parts of Brecht's work through phrases or images drawn from Marx, Valentin and Chaplin in order to produce his own speculative descriptions. For example, based on a letter from 1931 in which Brecht opines that Chaplin “‘would in many ways come closer to the epic than to the dramatic theatre's requirements',” Schechter imagines a scene from *Mann ist Mann*:

One of Gay's Chaplinesque recoveries occurs when he wakes on the train to Tibet, discovers the Widow Begbick lying next to him and hears that they've slept together. A sheepish, Chaplin-like grin might be seen on his face [...] (72)

Schechter's readings often rely on allusions such as 'Chaplin-like' and 'Chaplinesque,' rather than an analytical account of Chaplin or Valentin's significance as performers or their influence on Brecht. However, perhaps it is too little to call these 'allusions'. Above, Schechter offers an illustrative example for his thesis by way of an imagined performance. This is a process that takes us from Chaplin's 'influence' on Brecht to the text of *Mann ist Mann* to a moment in which a 'Chaplin-like grin' emerges on someone else's face. Not only has something of Chaplin's grin become detached, it has reappeared as a piece of Galy Gay. Galy Gay, dis- and re-assembled by the action of the play, is broken apart and reconstructed by historicizing re-imagining. These fragmentations and putting-back-together-agains occur by different means and in different registers, but both produce and condition Gay's corporeality. In assembling a historical lineage of artistic inspiration, Schechter transfers a fragment of Chaplin to our understanding of Galy Gay, and comic influences become pieces of corporealities. But these are not the only pieces affixed or applied to Galy Gay.

Representations of Corporeality in *Mann ist Mann*

Peter Sloterdijk makes a provocative connection between dismembered corporeality and *Mann ist Mann* in his 1983 *Critique of Cynical Reason*, specifically in the chapter "Artificial Limbs: Functionalist Cynicisms II." However, a careful approach is warranted, as the preceeding chapter, "Depersonalization and Alienation:

Functionalist Cynicisms I” involves an account of the play which assigns Brecht to a “new quality of irony” that is difficult to reconcile with the epic theatre as discussed above:

With Brecht, too, the stance recurs that we found at first in Dadaist irony: letting oneself be thrown and pushed around by the given state of affairs, which is no longer counterposed by any flimsy ideas or upright poses. More important than self-composure is insight into what really confronts us. (441)

Mann ist Mann has a privileged role in Sloterdijk's discussion here, as he finds that “[t]his irony's model piece” is the same interjection to *Mann ist Mann* quoted, in part, in the epigraph to this chapter (441). Sloterdijk places the 'ironic stance' he finds in *Mann ist Mann* alongside what he calls a “nonaffirmative form of affirmation,” which “does not resist reality with 'imagined fancies' but exercises resistance in the form of unresisting accommodation” (441).

Does this unresisting resistance operate in *Mann ist Mann*? The procedures of the play do not speak to ironic accommodation but to the rigours of dis- and re-assembly: the initial openness of Galy Gay is not without subsequent resistance, and the final scene, where Gay/Jip triumphs as a soldier, is dominated by his 'upright pose' and newly fashioned 'self-composure'. Nevertheless, there is something recognizable as Sloterdijk makes a connection to Chaplin in an analytical, rather than descriptive fashion:

It is rather the irony of a bashed ego who has got caught up in the clockwork (rather like Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*) who makes its hands as dirty as the circumstances are and who, in the

midst of the goings-on, only takes care to observe alertly what it encounters. (441)

Sloterdijk finds, in both Chaplin and Brecht, that the action resulting from being 'caught up' in the world serves to reveal the destructive and dangerous character of the world: this accords with the action of the play, and perhaps even Benjamin's untragic hero or Cardullo's picaro, who adapts to changing circumstances. However, while this might account for the *activity* of a character, it does not address the *irony* of an author.

Perhaps this can be clarified with a further examination of the specific paradoxical status of 'nonaffirmative affirmation' and the resistance that Sloterdijk assigns to it. Such a form of resistance is specific to Sloterdijk's understanding of Europe's then-present situation:

What those who are unstable call to for salvation is, in fact, the source of the evil. The institutions to which the conservative antinihilists cling with gloomy sympathies are the real "agents of nihilism." (440)

Sloterdijk draws on the work of Walter Rathenau and Hermann Rauschning to produce this account of inversion, where the opposition to nihilism now depends on, and drives at, nihilism. Crucially, Sloterdijk asserts: "[w]hat is here put forward by philosophizing statesmen is confirmed in the work of contemporary writers. Among them, Bertolt Brecht claims a special status" (441). Sloterdijk positions the resistance specific to the 'nonaffirmative affirmation' against that which, having previously been oppositional, has now become subservient to the forces it once aimed to overcome.

However, from this need for inverted means, Sloterdijk renders Brecht's epic theatre as a procedure in inversion. In place of imminent critique, where Brecht's work takes up and inhabits alienated and alienating forms in order to estrange them, the ironic inversions at issue, "as a form of going along, of being-in-the-times," require that the past be broken with: "We cannot live off the *good old values*, it is better to start with the *bad new reality*" (441). This vision of Brecht's work turns to 'the bad new reality' not as an object of critical engagement, but because it is the 'better' of the options available: rather than an ironic detachment, Sloterdijk imagines an ironic connection. This form requires further inversions, such that the ironic adoption of 'the bad new reality' is presented as Brecht "outdo[ing] the nostalgic lamentations about alienation," a maneuver which saves Brecht from the unusable 'good old values' as well as his own history (442).

If this reading threatens to conflate Brecht's representation of 'the bad new reality' with its ironic affirmation, Sloterdijk's subsequent chapter, 'Artificial Limbs: Functionalist Cynicisms II,' makes use of Brecht in a very different fashion. Instead of attempting to render Brecht as his contemporary, or as a post-modern *avant la lettre*, in this chapter Sloterdijk discusses the injured survivors of the First World War, and contains no mention of irony. Instead, Sloterdijk positions "the physically alienated, the mutilated, and the reassembled" as poorly served by artists, such as Brecht, whose critical works used "sarcasm to outdo the degradation of the individual that had become apparent in the modern social order" (443). Sloterdijk accounts for this inadequacy as a matter of how the loss of individuality is experienced:

It makes a difference whether one reflects on the loss of individuality as a critique of culture, or experiences how a war (or labor) tears away pieces from one's own ("indivisible") body. (443)

Even if Brecht's sarcasm fails to properly address the suffering of wounded veterans, Sloterdijk nevertheless finds use for it when discussing the state's institutional engagement with these survivors. I quote here at length, as Sloterdijk remarks on the enthusiasm with which "standard psychotechnical textbooks" recommended the "training of the body to handle artificial limbs":

The optimism with which those teachers of the maimed imbued their charges with a positive attitude and a vital joy in their continued work seems today like a parody. With deadly earnest, grimly humorous, patriotic doctors turned to the cripples: The Fatherland requires your services in the future, too: one-armed, one-legged men and wearers of artificial limbs can fight again on the production front. The great machine does not ask whether it is "individuals" who are here active for it, or units of human and artificial limbs. A man is a man. In the textbooks on the maimed and the writings of the medical-technical industry, a highly apposite image of the human being emerges: *Homo prostheticus*, who is supposed to say a wildly joyful Yes to everything that says No to the "individuality" of "individuals." (444-6)

Here, the mode of address belonging to the 'medical-technical industry' is likened to 'parody,' and then subsequently Brecht appears in allusion to *Der Jasager/Der*

Neinsager.¹² Sloterdijk tells us that the sarcastic intervention he ascribes to Brecht is unsuitable for 'the mutilated,' but when Sloterdijk considers the then-contemporaneous medical establishment, specifically its engagement with the reassembly of the 'physically alienated,' he conspicuously invokes Brecht's work. However, these usages must be distinguished. If, as Sloterdijk tells it, Brecht was attempting to 'outdo the degradation of the individual' through sarcasm, this cannot be said of the medical-technical industry Sloterdijk describes. Rather, Sloterdijk takes up a sarcastic Brechtian approach by attributing Brechtian phrases to the medical establishment of Weimar Germany. The sense of this 'parody' appears in the 'deadly earnest' of the 'grimly humorous doctors,' who have, in all seriousness, come to an advocacy and practice of what is in Brecht a sarcastic and excessive 'degradation of the individual'. If there were any doubt as to the sense of Sloterdijk's critical attack on the 'vital joy' of *homo prostheticus*, the passage quoted above is illustrated by an image labeled: "Wheelchair parade for the Führer, 1934" (446). In this photograph we see ranks of men in uniforms and wheelchairs, saluting Hitler as he conducts a military review. It is difficult to discern if any given salute takes its straightness and rigidity from national pride or prosthesis.

If I give a particular emphasis to this account, it is in part to provide an adequate frame in which to consider a more recent account of prosthesis in *Mann ist Mann*. Kate Elswit's 2008 "The Some of the Parts: Prosthesis and Function in Bertolt Brecht, Oskar Schlemmer, and Kurt Jooss" considers selected works by these artists in terms of

¹² Later in this chapter, Sloterdijk glosses "*Homo prostheticus* as a 'storm trooper' itching for action, as an exploiter of himself," which might well serve as an account for Jip/Gay at the conclusion of *Mann ist Mann* (451).

Sloterdijk's *homo prostheticus*. She acknowledges her usage of Sloterdijk's work in the body of her text, while an end note clarifies her deployment:

I use Sloterdijk's terminology with the understanding that, though he himself is proposing the term with a different implication in order to exemplify the "cynical reason" he explores in his study, he nevertheless offers a productive perspective in doing so. (Note 8, 406)

The 'productive perspective' Elswit draws out from Sloterdijk's *homo prostheticus* is "its celebration of human reassembly" and "the irrelevance of the body's wholeness for reintegrating veterans into society" (394). Elswit elaborates on the enthusiasm she detects:

[...] the cheerful and proudly independent new race of Weimar Germany's visibly augmented citizens, who wore such functional prostheses as the *Arbeitsarm*. Whereas Freud's prosthetic God offers an anxiety-laden image of human enhancement, Sloterdijk draws attention to the optimism of *homo prostheticus* in relation to his supplementation, his 'positive attitude and . . . vital joy' (394)

In Sloterdijk's telling, as quoted above, the optimism under discussion is not that of 'the maimed,' but of their 'teachers,' and this optimism is akin to parody. However, Elswit, through selective quotation, attributes the 'vital joy' to the patient, and presents this account without any apparent reference to parody, sarcasm, or irony. Her celebration of *homo prostheticus* disables the critical engagement Sloterdijk develops, and this reading extends to her account of *Mann ist Mann*:

One of the most striking aspects of Galy Gay's reassembly – working through the physical to the psychological – is its endorsement, like *homo prostheticus*, of a pragmatic relationship between humans and technology. (395)

In order to maintain this account of the play, in which the psychological is the register of optimism and endorsement, Elswit stresses versions and accounts of the play occurring prior to 1931. She discusses the 'later' revisions as being driven by “the growing strength of the fascist movement in Germany,” which

[...] caused Brecht to foreground the negative potential in Galy Gay's communal, psychological reassembly, thus eliminating the piece's earlier ambivalence. (396)

However, Elswit immediately returns to that 'earlier ambivalence' as the object of her discussion, in order to highlight how the prior versions of *Mann ist Mann*

[...] had used humour to dispel those tensions and deal instead with what David Midgley has called 'the implications of technology as a natural human activity'. (396)

These 'tensions,' defeated by 'humour': Elswit identifies them as “the threatening possibilities inherent in the potential for humans to cease to function with individuation” (396). There is no sense here that these 'possibilities' arising from a 'potential' have actually occurred or might occur, even in a play. Instead, the 'later' Brecht's critical engagement is diverted into a hypothetical, revealing an 'early,' psychological Brecht.

However, not all accounts addressing an 'early' Brecht result in an apolitical focus on interiority. For example, Sloterdijk's preface to his *Critique* clarifies which Brecht he means to address. Here, Sloterdijk considers what might be made of Pier Paolo Pasolini's critical work:

Perhaps Pasolini's image of the pirate intellect can reflect light on Brecht, I mean on the young, bad Brecht, not the Brecht who believed he had to conduct classes on the Communist galley.

(xxxvi)

It is the 'early' misbehaving Brecht who provides Sloterdijk with an image of the cynicism and impiety he requires. In the ambiguity of 'early' Brecht, before some discussion of orthodoxy or commitment must be entered into, a considerable contestation of imaginations can be found. Does Brecht = Brecht? Only, it would seem, through a process of irony such as Sloterdijk describes. Similarly, when Elswit clarifies her focus on the 'early' *Mann ist Mann*, her insistence on the pragmatic, or the functional, comes to resemble the parody Sloterdijk remarks upon:

It is the interplay between that earlier search to redefine post-war humanness pragmatically, on the one hand, and the impact of medical technology, on the other, that is at issue here. (396-7)

It is a curious 'interplay' that invokes a distinction between, on the one hand, a pragmatic redefinition of humanness, and on the other, functional augmentation for industrial labour by a medical-technical enterprise. These two go hand in augmented hand, as an industrial practice and a narrative of legitimation.

Elswit sees *Mann ist Mann* as lacking in its “reliance on the body as a medium of dramaturgy” (392). She emphasizes the sense in which *Mann ist Mann* operates according to Brecht's “manipulations of language,” “discourse” and “literary practice,” in contrast to her treatment of the choreography of Jooss and Schlemmer (397). The distinction implied here, between body and text as 'mediums of dramaturgy,' emerges in her account of the “metaphors of physical damage” in *Mann ist Mann* as being “actualized in selective costume choices” (392).

[...] the transformation that is a metaphorical aspect of the text was supplemented in production by tangible staging techniques.

Brecht's notes on direction accord with photographs that indicate how the soldiers whom Galy Gay joins were themselves costumed through quasi-prosthetic augmentation, their bodies enlarged by stilts, padding, and wire hangers, false noses, and enormous hands.

(395)¹³

Elswit's divided conception of body and text appears here as a split between 'metaphor' and 'tangible staging techniques'. However, both are to be augmented, producing a strangely double prostheses: on the one hand, elements of costume augment the performers, on the other, the 'metaphorical aspect of the text' is supplemented by those same 'tangible' pieces. Perhaps this curious double-prosthesis suggests that the traditional understanding of a body that is subsequently augmented must be rethought. Starting from the prosthesis instead, perhaps it could be seen that these other existences,

¹³ While Elswit does not specify which production she is describing, her account here closely resembles images and discussions of the 1931 production in Berlin, with Peter Lorre as Galy Gay. For example, one such description can be found in Joel Schechter's article discussed above.

metaphorical or bodily, appear only as the subjects of augmentation: their supplementation awaits them, even anticipates them. To follow this line is to arrive at the nadir of Sloterdijk's vision of *homo prostheticus*, where the “great machine does not ask whether it is 'individuals' who are here active for it, or units of human and artificial limbs. A man is a man” (*Critique of Cynical Wisdom* 446). A man is a man only insofar as he is anticipated by a machine, to which he will be made to fit.

A different approach to *Mann ist Mann* in terms of the 'psychotechnical' practices of the Weimar Republic can be found in Brigid Doherty's “Test and Gestus in Brecht and Benjamin.” Doherty's emphasis is on the industrial practices, rather than the medical objects, conditioning corporeality in inter-war Germany. Specifically, she directs attention to the emerging public and private deployment of “[p]sychotechnical aptitude tests”: “experimental vocational aptitude” examinations that began in World War I before being refashioned as a tool of “occupational counseling” (443-4). Doherty connects these mechanical tests of motor or nervous response to the epic theatre by way of Walter Benjamin. She looks to a radio address by Benjamin from 1930 in which he calls for his listeners to examine and report the effects of these examinations:

Observing themselves and their colleagues at work, then conveying their observations to the radio station for public broadcast, Benjamin's listeners would transform themselves from actual or potential subjects of the performance tests of occupational science [...] listeners would become participants [...] capable of taking up the position of test administrator as well as test subject. (448)

Doherty emphasizes this “doubling of the subject's position within the test”: she argues for a substantial connection between this procedure and Benjamin's thinking on the transformation of art, as well as Brecht's theatre in the 1930s (448).

Focusing on the 1931 performance of *Mann ist Mann*, Doherty positions the play as “incorporating” such transformative efforts “on the level of both theme and technique” (449). In terms of Brecht's technique in *Mann ist Mann*, Doherty looks to a passage from the early draft of “What is Epic Theatre?” Here, as Benjamin quotes Brecht, Doherty, in her own translation, describes a project to transform an audience from “a mass of hypnotized test subjects” to “a theater full of experts” (449). Cast expressly in the language of the psychotechnical examination, Doherty presents a 'doubling' of the audience in the epic theatre similar to that proposed in Benjamin's radio address.

On the level of theme for *Mann ist Mann*, Doherty again turns to a psychotechnical understanding. She finds that the practices of psychotechnical examination produce a representation of “persons composed of bodily gestures in which a set of habits and a particular occupational posture can be recognized and tested ” (*Test and Gestus* 450). Doherty presents the play in these terms:

Mann ist Mann proceeds from the same understanding of persons, occupations, experiments, tests, habits, posture, and gestures, and it reveals that understanding through a kind of crude reverse-engineering of Galy Gay: a human being is made insofar as he is made to demonstrate, through a series of experiments and tests, the posture and gestures of the occupation he is made to take up. (450)

To forestall an interpretation based in a subject's internality being attached to this account, Doherty stresses that “the transformation of Galy Gay is emphatically external, with changes, to repeat, represented in posture and gesture” (452).

Here, I would intervene to suggest that Doherty's insistence on externality does not exclude discussion of a subject or subjectivity. Her account of persons as recognized by psychotechnical procedures, as 'bodily gestures,' 'posture,' 'habits,' includes a sense of subjective activity. As the occupational testing of bodies is aimed at measuring the capacities and dexterities of the (prospective) worker, this process involves both the objective and subjective characters of corporeality (as discussed in my previous chapter). Doherty's account presents these occupational examinations as conditioning corporeality to the needs of a particular institutional legibility, that of industrial labour, and that *Mann ist Mann* involves an analogous understanding of persons.

Recalling Elswit's account, in which the dis- and re- assembly of Galy Gay is presented as “working through the physical to the psychological,” the prosthetic object leads to the prosthetic subject (*The Some of the Parts* 395). In contrast, if my supplementation of Doherty's account is appropriate, then the aim of this psychotechnical occupational counseling is neither a subject nor an object, but a prosthetic corporeality that can be made to augment the industrial machine.

Doherty has a particular reason to stress externality as the correct register of interpretation for the transformation of Galy Gay. Specifically, Doherty is concerned with distancing *Mann ist Mann* from the internality of “contemporary versions of Aristotelian drama,” whose depiction of 'inner life' aims at “a collapse of sympathy and imitation,” a collapse “according to which 'every spectator' as it were adopts the identity

of the character on stage” (452). Doherty develops this reading from Brecht's account, by which “in a performance of Oedipus one has for all practical purposes a theater full of little Oedipuses” (Brecht qtd in Doherty 452).

Key to Doherty's argument here is the 'collapse' of sympathetic and mimetic response in the audience: she does not argue that sympathy or imitation are in a general sense inappropriate to *Mann ist Mann*, but where they “coincide” the audience may connect to a character as if they shared “an identity extant, if latent, before the performance” (452). The temporality Doherty discusses is worth noting: the identity that emerges from the collapse of imitation and sympathy appears as though it existed prior to the performance. This identity, created in the performance, appears as it were were in place before the action begins, suggesting a phantom continuity of the circumstances in which that identity is realized. That is, as the recognition of this 'inner life' also projects this identity into the past, something resembling Williams' 'enclosure' of time, scene and situation goes with it, perhaps not in terms of specific elements, but in terms of a continuity upon which to recognize the identity in question. In different terms, the removal of this enclosure or the separation of sympathetic and imitative attentions both act to prevent the formation of an identity that is historicized as prior to the performance.

Doherty reads *Mann ist Mann* specifically, and the epic theatre more generally, as being aimed at preventing the collapse of sympathy and imitation, which would otherwise disable the 'doubling' of the audience. An analogy can be made here, between the potential collapse of imitation and sympathy and the two tasks of the actor. In both cases, the danger consists of two elements merging into one, producing an identity that

forecloses the critical project of *Mann ist Mann*. Conspicuously, the unity at issue in both cases is that by which a particular form of individual is recognized. This similarity might be understood as approaching a single phenomenon, the 'character,' from perspectives corresponding to the actor and the audience, but self and subject should not be conflated with imitation and sympathy, and the critical element in this circumstance is to avoid singularization. Perhaps it would be better to consider the matter as consisting in (at least) these four activities, sympathy, self, imitation, and subject, and the various strategies, including interruption and juxtaposition, that effect their separation.

Alongside these modes in which identity is to be resisted or undone, *Mann ist Mann* enacts alternative understandings of equality. Doherty looks to the sometime title of *Mann = Mann*, where she finds the “=” proposed “stresses not one man’s innermost likeness to another, but their interchangeability” (453). This external interchangeability, rather than internal similarity, corresponds with the sense of 'occupation' as Doherty discusses it above. This is a theatrical approach appropriate to the vision of 'persons composed of bodily gestures' produced by psychotechnical counseling, itself a situation where empathy with an 'inner life' of humanity is inappropriate, damaging, or irrelevant.

The thematic and technical elements of *Mann ist Mann* that Doherty has discussed come to intersect in her account of gestus. Doherty's approach to this matter involves her blending of Benjamin and Brecht, such that, for example, an inquiry into the thinking of the one is explicated in the language of the other, or a particular critical project might be seen to emerge from Benjamin before passing to Brecht before being reflected back upon Benjamin's work. This constant cross-fertilization involves Doherty

looking to the substantial archive of interaction between the two as a field in which to pursue her thesis. This strongly characterizes her account of *gestus*, which she nevertheless glosses in a different vocabulary, as “the embeddedness of [...] speech or posture in a complex of social relations and processes” (457).

Doherty approaches her account of *gestus* by way of the German term *Haltung*, in its sense of 'posture' or 'attitude'.¹⁴ When Brecht discusses *gestus* as 'the quotable gesture,' Doherty finds Benjamin exploring and extending the means by which a gesture might become quotable. The translation is Doherty's:

Benjamin emphasizes the importance of *Haltung* in Brecht, which he sees as “something new, and what is new about it is that it can be learned.” (458)

Doherty develops Benjamin's account of *Haltung* as providing the means by which *gestus* can be learned, as an isolated pose that can be repeated, then imitated, and hence quoted. This accords with her understanding of the psychotechnical examination process, which, in envisioning persons as bodily gestures, aims at a legibility and measurement of *Haltung* specific to particular occupations.

Doherty further expands the significance of *Haltung* for *Mann ist Mann* in two directions. The first is *Haltung's* connection to military practice and regimentation, focusing on the posture of the soldier at roll-call in both the World War I German army and the play. She also notes the early deployment of psychotechnical testing as a form

¹⁴ It should be mentioned here that Doherty's account falls into the tradition of reading *Haltung* and *gestus* through Benjamin, relying on him as her major source: See, for example, Darko Suvin's *To Brecht and Beyond: Soundings in Modern Dramaturgy*.

of military aptitude testing before being re-purposed after the war as a more general occupational practice.

Doherty identifies a second sense of *Haltung*'s importance for *Mann ist Mann*, as a “stopping or interruption” of the gesture (474). Here, the connection between *Haltung* and interruption leads Doherty to argue that:

Once again his [Benjamin's] meditations take us to the body in the situation of the psychotechnical test, where the interruption of action and movement is a technique for exposing the *Haltung* of a test subject as a means of assessing his fitness for a particular occupation. (474)

In terms of a more general account of the epic theatre, the return to the psychotechnical emphasizes the critical engagement described by Doherty's account. The gesture, interrupted and repeated as *Haltung*, becomes gestus, and by observing the production of gestus, becoming 'experts' at the 'test,' the audience is to become capable of critical reflection on the situation.

In a more specific sense, the themes of military conduct and interruption attached to *Haltung* offers Doherty an exposition and justification of her claim that *Mann ist Mann* offers a singular field in which to consider gestus: “The technique through which Galy Gay learns the *Haltung* of the soldier by imitating its gestures is the technique of epic acting.” (458) The identity proposed here is between the practice of an epic actor and the activity of the character Galy Gay. This should not be thought of as in tension with the two tasks of the actor. Doherty is primarily concerned with the *learning* of gestus, by which she makes connection to occupational tests. Even if the

'technique' of the actor and the character are the same, their subject matter is not, and the two tasks of the actor explicitly involve interruption for the purpose of reflection. Galy Gay/Jeraiah Jip does, on occasion, reflect about his situation, but as a part of the unfolding of his role, and not as its interruption.

Summary

Bertolt Brecht's *Mann ist Mann*, in the multiple versions and historical account discussed here, provides a means to consider corporeality through a number of the narratives attached to Brecht and his epic work. In particular, these include an actor's work in the epic theatre, as presented by Brecht, elaborated upon by Benjamin, and operating in the light of psychotechnical testing and social re-integration of fragmented bodies. This discussion makes clear the dangers of losing sight of the specific critical intervention in the play, where the celebration of a reintegrated individual is taken to be the aim of the work, without reference to anything beyond the contentment of the subject who has been remade: remade, no doubt, to be content.

In part, the debates over the 'correct' influences and genre or genres to apply to *Mann ist Mann* arise from the specific critical approach found in the play. My discussion of Raymond Williams' 'open theatre' provides a means by which to recognize this intersection of imminent critical practice and historiographic labours. I argue that Williams' discussion of a theatrical 'enclosure' of fixed time and place that *Mann ist Mann* deploys, avoids, and breaks on a number of levels demands a critical reconsideration of the theatrical forms involved. In particular, individuality is configured differently in at least four ways, that of the character, that of the actor, that of the inter-scenic structure of the play, and that of the audience. It is the interplay of

these varied levels of representation and reception that produces the specific understanding of corporeality found in *Mann ist Mann* and its critical force, in line with the thinking of a play that remakes itself, and by means of the ideological register of individuality, its audience.

Chapter Three – Brechtian Realism and Debord's Spectacle

Brecht wanted to reveal in images the inner nature of capitalism. In this sense, his aim was indeed what he disguised it as against Stalinist terror – realistic.

- Adorno, *Commitment*, 183

The spectacle is *capital* in such a degree of accumulation that it becomes image.

- Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, thesis 34¹⁵

What can be 'revealed' when the 'inner nature of capitalism' is indistinguishable from the images meant to address it? What possibilities and limitations does a Brechtian practice face when the dominant fetishism of a society passes from things to appearances? Can images gain critical traction on images? Where and when the historical materialist 'first fact' of human organization changes, so too must the specificity of Marxist fetishism be reconsidered, and in this chapter I revise my understanding of Brechtian practice and Marxist corporeality under conditions of Debord's spectacle.

My move from Marx's presentation of commodity fetishism to Debord's is primarily motivated by the changing character of those nations capable of entertaining the ideological fantasy of a 'post-industrial' society, alongside the preponderance of technologies of appearance that promise sociality.

¹⁵ Here I follow the practice of identifying passages from *The Society of the Spectacle* by thesis, rather than by page. Translations from *La Société du Spectacle* and *Commentaires sur la Société du Spectacle* are my own, unless otherwise noted.

Additionally, Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* presents an extraordinary challenge to the viability of Brechtian critical practices, and I find that this encounter serves to reveal the importance of fetishism in configuring these theatrical practices and the corporealities attending them. Debord's spectacle brings questions of appearance and representation to the foreground of fetishism with an urgency that Marx's formulation does not. This changing relation between appearance and life has profound effects on the relation of art and life that grounds Brechtian practices. Using the term 'Brechtian realism,' I pursue this shift in order to expose the backbone of fetishism running through such practices.

With this understanding of spectacular fetishism, I then turn to the matter of spectacular corporeality, where I look to Walter Benjamin's account of fashion in the *Arcades Project* as source material for a left-Hegelian account of bodies in contact with what I term 'display-value'.

An initial outline of Brechtian Realism and Spectacle

Adorno's epigraph to this chapter introduces Brecht's realism in a doubled sense. First is that of a 'disguise against Stalinist terror,' and perhaps this can be found in the claim to realism which Brecht made in his 1938 letter "On the Formalistic Character of the Theory of Realism." This letter, unpublished until after Brecht's death, was written during his work on the play that would become *The Private Life of the Master Race*, also known as *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*. In the face of an official line on representation that specified Social Realism, Brecht here tries to associate himself with a realism not bound to 'formalistic theories' as he accounts for his work in progress:

So far I have written 27 separate scenes. Some of them fit roughly into the 'realistic' pattern X, if one shuts one eye. Others don't – absurdly enough, because they are very short. The whole work doesn't fit into it at all. I consider it to be a realistic play. I learnt more for it from the paintings of the peasant Breughel than from treatises on realism. (70)

Those 'treatises on realism' have indeed done little to inform *Fear and Misery*, which offers no continuity of place, time, action, or character between its scenes: a realistic 'pattern' respecting such concerns would be hard pressed to account for more than a single scene.

The second sense in which Adorno acknowledges Brecht's realism is in its object: to 'reveal' the hidden workings of capitalism in representation. This sense of realism, as a relation between art and life, can also be found in Fredric Jameson's "Reflections," an essay reviewing the discourses now known as the Expressionismusdebatte, Realismusdebatte, or Brecht-Lukács debate of the 1930s (Brecht's letter above is frequently positioned within these debates). Jameson outlines these debates as a contrast between modernism and realism in aesthetic production: he identifies realism as a "new value, contemporaneous with the secularization of the world under capitalism," where the "originality of the concept of realism" is found "in its claim to cognitive as well as aesthetic status" (198). Realism then addresses *cognition of the real* in representation, "a form of aesthetic experience which yet lays claim to a binding relationship to the real itself" (198). Jameson clarifies this significance as he tells us that realism is:

[...] an uneasily different quantity from such traditional aesthetic categories as comedy and tragedy, or lyric, epic and dramatic. The latter – whatever social functionality may be invoked for them in this or that philosophical system – are purely aesthetic concepts, which may be analysed and evaluated without any reference outside the phenomenon of beauty or the activity of artistic play [...] (197-8)

The goals and means of Brecht's theatre are incoherent if they are understood as purely aesthetic matters, or if they possess social significance only within the confines of a 'philosophical system.' The authority and power of this kind of realism and its engagement with cognition of the world is required: given Brecht's critical tendency, it may be that the 'unease' or 'difficulties' Jameson speaks of are precisely what is sought.

Proceeding with this sense of realism in mind, a number of salient considerations are offered by Raymond Williams in the entry for realism in his *Keywords*: before arriving at the sense of realism in representation, Williams observes difficulties arising from "real," a term that, "from the beginning, has had this shifting double sense" (258). Williams tells us that "real" is *double* as it contrasts "imaginary" as well as "apparent," and it is *shifting* as it is a single term that moves across its internal division between these overlapping senses (258).¹⁶ Williams identifies a substantial academic and critical labour upon realism that draws on this shifting across a

¹⁶ In this latter sense, Williams notes application to "theological arguments about the 'real presence' of Christ in the materials of communion." (258) For an examination of this presence in the histories of medieval theatrical practice, see Kobiak's *This Is My Body: Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages*.

doubled sense, such that “[a]gain and again, from positions of this kind, realism has been accused of evading the real” (260).

From the outset, let me insist that a Brechtian realism would involve both a doubling and a shifting in this sense, moving between a non-imaginary and a non-apparent account of the world and our cognition of it. Recalling the passage from Benjamin's “What is Epic Theatre?” discussed in the previous chapter:

Brecht wrote: “The actor must show his subject, and he must show himself. Of course, he shows his subject by showing himself, and he shows himself by showing his subject. Although the two coincide, they must not coincide in such a way that the difference between the two tasks disappears.” In other words: an actor should reserve for himself the possibility of stepping out of character artistically. At the proper moment, he should insist on portraying a man who reflects about his part. (*Illuminations*, 153)

Understood in Williams' terms, this Brechtian realism would not reduce doubling nor cease shifting, but rather requires these, in order for the corporealities of the step-out-of-character to coincide without collapsing and come to reflect upon one another. This twinned sense of 'real' and its mobility provide an initial outline for an understanding of Brechtian realism.

However, in continuing with Williams' entry, he addresses a formidable objection to realism where:

[...] the medium in which this representation occurs, whether language or stone or paint or film, is radically different from the

objects *represented* in it, so that the effect of 'lifelike representation', 'the reproduction of reality', is at best a particular artistic convention, at worst a falsification making us take the forms of representation as *real*. (*Keywords*, 260-1)

Williams presents this problem of 'the reproduction of reality' as an ongoing failure in realism. However, where and when the spectacle has taken hold, a curious inversion of this logic emerges. Under the spectacle, social life arises from the alienated mediation of images: here, Williams' account of the disconnect between object and medium resolves itself into an apparent unity, becoming an ongoing affirmation of reality as representation. This affirmation, part of what Debord calls the "enormous positivity" of the spectacle, has a peculiar application to theatre in the Aristotelian tradition of representation (thesis 12). If we were to read S.H. Butcher's translation of *The Poetics* as describing an aesthetics that possessed a claim to realism, rather than one divorced from such concerns, we might discover a curious equivalence in the matter of medium and object. Such a terribly butchered reading might proceed: "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is [...] in the form of action" (*Poetics*, part IV). Under the spectacle, an action in the form of action offers the possibility of a medium similar, even identical, to the object of representation. This 'theatrical realism of the spectacle' then undoes the objection Williams describes: rather than a witness to the falseness of the 'lifelike', it instead stages and testifies to the *recognition* of the 'lifelike' as life.

Brecht once insisted that "he who is showing should himself be shown" (*The Literarization of the Theatre*, 44). Under the spectacle, to show and to be shown are as one: self and subject have been made to coincide without difference, not as a failure of

aesthetics, but as a general condition of life. The step-out-of-character, meant to occasion reflection, cannot proceed dialectically under such conditions.

Debord's Spectacle: The Fulfillment of Fetishism

This is the principle of commodity fetishism, the domination of society by “things sensuous as well as beyond the senses,” which is absolutely fulfilled in the spectacle, where the sensuous world is replaced by a selection of images which exist above it, while at the same time, recognizing these images as the exemplar of sensuousness.

(Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, thesis 36)

In Debord's presentation of the spectacle as an 'absolute fulfillment' of the project undertaken by commodity fetishism, he invokes two key elements of the tradition he seeks to surmount. The first of these is found in the unsourced quotation in the passage above, '*things sensuous as well as beyond the senses*', which draws on Marx's well-known description of the commodity fetish in *Capital*.¹⁷

In addition to Marx, Debord takes up György Lukács' work: in this case, specifically on reification as a furtherance and generalization of commodity fetishism. One significance of this inclusion can be seen in an echo and amplification of Lukács: the epigraph to chapter two of *The Society of the Spectacle* (the same chapter which

¹⁷ The passage Debord quotes here, as « des choses suprasensibles bien que sensibles », is drawn from *Capital*, volume 1, as might be found in French in *Karl Marx, Œuvres*. ed. Maximilien Rubel. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1963, pg 606. Donald Nicholson-Smith's translation of *The Society of the Spectacle* draws on Moore and Aveling's translation of *Capital* for his rendering of thesis 36: “at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.” The 1970 English translation of *The Society of the Spectacle* by Fredy Perlman, Tony Verlaan, Paul Sieveking, Michel Prigent, Colin Carsten and John Fullerton, often identified as the “Red and Black” version after its publisher, renders this portion of thesis thirty-six as “intangible as well as tangible things.”

contains thesis 36, above) is drawn from Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*.¹⁸

Here I quote only the first line: “The commodity can only be understood in its undistorted essence when it becomes the universal category of society as a whole” (Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 86). As Lukács asserts and Debord affirms, the commodity cannot be fully apprehended until it comes to take on a universalizing, totalizing character: Debord extends this logic to its 'absolute' fulfillment in the spectacle, so that even as the spectacle 'perfects' economic alienation, it reveals the prior regime of commodity fetishism as an incomplete predecessor, unable to totalize as the spectacle does. Debord sketches this historical process:

The previous phase of the economy's domination over social life had brought about, in all human affairs, a hollowing out and degradation of being into having. The current phase, in which social life is completely occupied by the accumulations of the economy's output, has passed through a general shift from having to appearing, such that “having” actually draws its immediate value and final purpose from appearance. At the same time, all individual(ized) reality has become social, and directly dependent on social power to shape it. It is only insofar as individuality is negated that it is permitted to appear. (thesis 17)

Debord, in the development of alienation that drives *being* into *having* into *appearing*, finds that 'all individual reality' has been made to take on 'a social character.' Here he

¹⁸ Debord has inserted an ellipsis into the full quote from Lukács, an ellipsis that suppresses a paragraph in which Lukács quotes volume one of *Capital* in support of his concept of reification. The passage Lukács quotes here is, of course, the same description quoted above containing the phrase 'at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses'. In this fashion, both perceptibly and imperceptibly, Debord quotes Marx from *Capital* and Lukács quoting the same passage from *Capital*.

extends the range and logic of fetishism beyond the production and circulation of commodities. Marx's account of fetishism locates the compensatory world of illusory integrity as emerging from the alienation of industrial specialization in production. Instead, the spectacle arises from and comes to encompass all negations of 'individual reality.'

This move towards a universalizing character does not directly address the peril of a medium and object of representation that come to be identical. However, this is only one sense in which the spectacle 'absolutely fulfills' the project of commodity fetishism, and the universalizing character of the spectacle arises hand in hand with its logic of alienation:

The fact that the practical power of modern society detaches itself from itself and builds an independent empire in the spectacle can only be accounted for by the fact that this powerful practice continues to lack cohesion, remaining in contradiction with itself.
(thesis 22)

In keeping with his assembling and extending a tradition, Debord frequently takes up a passage from another author without quotation or identification, and preserves the idiom while displacing the language, as if he were inhabiting the husk of the former author's work, which is now animated by Debord's concerns.¹⁹ The above thesis, found in the first chapter of *The Society of the Spectacle*, "Separation Perfected," stands as an example of the procedure, one that implicitly draws Ludwig Feuerbach's thought into

¹⁹ Perhaps this is the practice that Debord refers to in thesis 207: "Ideas improve. The meaning of words has a part in the improvement. Plagiarism is necessary. Progress demands it. Staying close to an author's phrasing, plagiarism exploits his expressions, erases false ideas, replaces them with correct ideas." (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith) In this passage, Debord is, of course, plagiarizing Comte de Lautréamont's 1870 *Poésies*.

Debord's discussion: the twenty-second thesis recalls and rewrites a sentence of Marx's fourth Thesis on Feuerbach, which I quote here in full:

Feuerbach starts out from the fact of religious self-estrangement, of the duplication of the world into a religious world and a secular one. His work consists in resolving the religious world into its secular basis. But that the secular basis lifts off from itself and establishes itself as an independent realm in the clouds can only be explained by the inner strife and intrinsic contradictoriness of this secular basis. The latter must, therefore, itself be both understood in its contradiction and revolutionised in practice. Thus, for instance, once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be destroyed in theory and in practice.

(Marx and Engels Collected Works, vol 5, 7)

In Marx's fourth thesis, Feuerbach's goal is presented as the destruction of religious alienation, and his method is to demonstrate that the religious account of the world is a duplication and a distortion of its 'secular basis.' Marx's criticism is that in doing so, Feuerbach does not recognize that the secular world is also alienated, and this secular alienation precedes the alienating and alienated religious world. Indeed, Marx insists that this religious world is only produced by an act of duplication meant to obscure secular contradictions: a fetishism of spirit attempting to connect those whom material relations have sundered. This religious duplicate is an obstacle to understanding that must be overcome, but only as a means to then address the secular alienation that

caused it. In the last sentences of the fourth Thesis, Marx proceeds immediately to the attack on such duplications as a first step in addressing underlying contradictions.

However, here I wish to examine the means by which these 'independent realms' come to be.

In the language of Marx's fourth thesis, fetishism, in presenting an alienated world as though it were not so, establishes a duplicate, distorted world by some means. Yet while all such alienated and alienating duplications must obscure the lack of coherence in the world they duplicate, not all duplications are of the same quality or character. Feuerbach's concerns lie with the religious mode of establishing an 'independent realm', while Marx addresses the secular means of commodity fetishism. Debord, by inhabiting Marx's phrase while refashioning its content and context, presents the spectacle in place of the distorted duplicate world that concerned Feuerbach, while also locating the spectacle as the culmination of commodity fetishism, with images-with-subjective-qualities superseding the role of objects-with-subjective-qualities.

Debord's account historicizes fetishism, from Feuerbach, to Marx, through Lukács, to this 'absolute fulfillment' in his own work, and this leads me to the crucial second sense in which the spectacle is an 'absolute fulfillment': as the distorted duplication of the world involves an illusory appearance, *only in the spectacle does it achieve this appearance by means of appearance*.

In Debord's idiom, one might say that the chief defect of all hitherto existing accounts of the alienating duplication of the world – that of Marx included – is that the duplicate world of *apparent* unity is conceived as the outcome of a process other than

that of *appearance*. Creating an illusory world of appearance by means of the circulation of images avoids certain contradictions and a lack of coherence in fetishism: only the spectacle overcomes the defects of prior forms in creating an 'independent realm.' As both the means and end of fetishism, the spectacle, in its totalizing character, becomes indistinguishable from the duplicate world it produces and this forms the root cause of the collapse of appearance and life that threatens the foreclosure of Brechtian realism.

Corporeality under Spectacle

Even as the sense of fetishism and alienation in Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* involves a reconsideration of that which is found in Marx, a similar reevaluation should attend corporeality under spectacle. However, two difficulties arise here that motivate my subsequent approach to this project. First, the paucity of Debord's interest in bodies or corporealities complicates this discussion. Secondly, my intellectual circumstances meet this scarcity in *The Society of the Spectacle* and closely related works with an extraordinarily rich literature which offers a variety of critical accounts of corporeality in semiotic or semiological terms. Despite my own intellectual formation amongst certain of these discourses, particularly that of Judith Butler, here I find reason to be wary of drawing on such approaches as the source material for a left-Hegelian critical theorization of corporeality under spectacle. This wariness arises in part from the differing sense of fetish and fetishism between Marxist and post-structuralist feminist accounts, as discussed in my introduction. However, in this particular instance, I am primarily concerned with the difficulty in maintaining Debord's

critical project in the face of a certain semiotic or rhetorical coherence, specifically one that does not admit to an account of spectacle as contradiction.

The deleterious effects of this kind of consistency can be seen in, for example, Thomas Levin's *Dismantling the Spectacle*, an otherwise careful account of Debord's films. Offering a brief overview of the spectacle by way of introduction, Levin correctly distinguishes the spectacle from the "spectacularity' of the filmic medium," before finding a difficulty in need of (at least provisional) resolution: (324)

The confusion surrounding the "spectacle" is to some extent produced by a slippage in Debord's employment of the term.

Sometimes it does refer to the realm of representation [...]

However in the next thesis, Debord differentiates between "images of the world" and "the spectacle in general, [...]" as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the nonliving."

Although this distinction itself merits a close and careful reading, for the present investigation it must suffice to say that the latter use of the expression is *allegorical* [...] (324)

Levin's account is ill served by this pragmatic foreclosure, as it results in misreading the critical register of Debord's work. When understood as contradiction, the spectacle involves both 'images of the world' and 'the spectacle in general,' not as a distinction, but as constitutive of the Marxist fetishism in Debord's formulation: the 'autonomous movement of the nonliving' is but another name for the 'phantasmagorical' or 'necromantic' aspect of the commodity form. The 'slippage' that Levin detects in Debord's usage, which he adduces as a straightforward error, is actually characteristic

and constitutive of Debord's understanding of contradiction under spectacle. However, in order to clarify what he mistakes as confusion, Levin inadvertently attempts to resolve what his own work elsewhere recognizes as an actually existing social contradiction. He does this by removing the discussion to a different register: remarkably, he has taken that which Debord correctly and explicitly names as *concrete*, and displaced it into *allegory*: the 'concrete inversion of life', meant to be understood as a material condition of lived existence, is made into an emblem or representation of an otherworldly meaning. This is an inversion of an inversion, and it is the by-product of contradiction being collapsed into conflation, as Levin continues:

The conflation in turn stems from Debord's rhetorical employment of the notion of spectacles qua images or representations to concretize his reading of “spectacle” as *the* allegory of late capital.

(324)

As this chapter and my own account so far no doubt attest, there is certainly a place for consideration of Debord's rhetorical practices. However, to find that Debord's goal is allegorical, and his method rhetorical, produces a spectacular account of the spectacle: where rhetorical or allegorical forms intervene, both as substitute for, and as superior to, sensuous experience, we encounter the triumphant logic of the spectacle, and not the emergence of a corrected critical practice.

Here, a particular coherence is gained at the price of taking the illusory realm of false integrity promised by spectacular fetishism as the terrain on which to understand and engage the spectacle. This procedure, which admits the logic of the spectacle, not as the explicit object of critical endeavour, but as an implicit means to achieve an

untroubled consistency, is not restricted to work on Debord. Marx's works have also been interpreted such that they produce a linguistic circumscription without contradiction: I am thinking of works like Hayden White's 1973 *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, which includes a chapter dedicated to reading Marx in service of a "Philosophical Defense of History in the Metonymical Mode" (281). Of course, White's defense does not only offer an account of Marx's historiographic "strategies of characterization," (one "Metonymical," the other "Synecdochic,") but presents these strategies, in their "Metonymical" relationship to one another, as "the mark as well as the measure of Marx's ultimately Materialistic conception of history" (286). Of course, a figure of speech operating as 'mark and measure' of materialism is foreign to Marx's own work. But it appears easily in the unfolding logic of the spectacle. Indeed, to speak of a society in which a rhetorical form joining two rhetorical forms is the 'mark and measure' of materialism is, at the very least, a mark and measure of the spectacle.

A fuller account of this approach to Marx might place White's piece alongside Thomas Keenan's 1993 "The Point is to (Ex)Change It: Reading *Capital*, Rhetorically," as well as W. J. T. Mitchell's 1986 chapter on "The Rhetoric of Iconoclasm: Marxism, Ideology, and Fetishism," or even Mitchell's more recent writings on the spectacle, such as 2008's "The Spectacle Today: A Response to RETORT" which places Debord's work in a collection of "the fundamental Imaginary structures of capitalist modernity" (574).

I sketch the possibility of such a tradition in order to ground my sense of skepticism towards the combination of Marxist critical theory and semiotics taken as a consistent means to resolve contradictions. I do not mean to suggest that all such

semiotic approaches are always or inevitably in the service of the spectacle, nor that semiotics is unproblematic without Marxist contradiction.²⁰ However, I do believe there is sufficient reason to suspect that these means are not well suited to inform the basis of a left-Hegelian account of corporeality under spectacle.

For this reason, I introduce 'display-value' here, as a term by which to draw on what is available in Debord's writing while turning to look at Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and the account of fashion found there as source material for my discussion of left-Hegelian bodies.

By display-value I mean to draw attention to both a specific aspect of *The Society of the Spectacle*, and a theme in Susan Buck-Morss' study of Benjamin's project, *The Dialectics of Seeing*. To be clear, neither Buck-Morss nor Debord uses the term 'display-value,' and Debord in particular does not venture anything directly comparable.²¹ Instead, I introduce the term as a means to identify and emphasize two different accounts of a new value in display, each found in its own Paris.

Looking first to Buck-Morss' account, I observe one sense of display-value in her presentation of the fetish as studied by Benjamin:

Marx had used the term “phantasmagoria” to refer to the deceptive appearances of commodities as “fetishes” in the marketplace. The *Passagen-Werk* entries cite the relevant passages from *Capital* on the fetish character of the commodity [...] But for Benjamin, whose point of departure was a philosophy of historical experience

²⁰ For example, Vicky Kirby's *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal* examines a host of difficulties and challenges stemming from post-structuralist semiotic accounts of bodies.

²¹ Other authors, writing on Debord, have deployed similar terms to address the novelty of valuation in Debord's work. See for example, 'sign value' in Jonathan Crary's “Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory” (457).

rather than an economic analysis of capital, the key to the new urban phantasmagoria was not so much the commodity-in-the-market as the commodity-on-display, where exchange value no less than use value lost practical meaning, and purely representational value came to the fore. (81-2)

In Marx's familiar presentation, at the very onset of commodity markets, exchange-value is subordinate to use-value such that only that which can be useful can be sold. Subsequent market development and intensification inflates consideration of exchange value, which comes to dominate what had once been its justification: only that which can be sold can be used. Buck-Morss here finds that Benjamin's work introduces a new value form, a 'purely representational value,' which I gloss as display-value. In Buck-Morss' account, this display-value does not emerge from an intensification of market activity, but in Benjamin's change of venue: from Marx's critical political economy to vistas of 'urban phantasmagoria,' which are themselves the outcome and site of market forces. Only in this type of environment, which Benjamin locates in the arcades of nineteenth-century Paris, does 'purely representational value' subordinate both exchange and use. (By localizing display-value to Benjamin's work on the arcades and Buck-Morss' reading therein, I mean, in part, to distinguish this usage from Benjamin's "exhibition value", as found counterposed to "cult value" in his "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility" essay (25).)

Within this milieu, sartorial fashion holds a particular place of importance, and to suggest that display-value attaches itself to fashion in an overt and intense way risks understating the matter. The privilege accorded fashion, as the reigning form in what

Benjamin schematized as “Hell – golden age,” is that now other commodities come to take on display-value *as if* they were fashion (*Arcades Project*, 906). Fashion in clothing brings display-value into contact with corporeality. Keeping the conditions of spectacle in mind, the interweaving of fashion and a subject's appearance involves a reifying process of alienation in which 'appearance' serves the sense of both visual and social recognition.

If this suffices for a first approach to display-value in Buck-Morss and Benjamin, then this should be placed in contrast with *The Society of the Spectacle*, as Debord does not characterize the commodity by value in display or as image: the spectacle is not one value amongst others, as in Buck-Morss' account of Benjamin's thought, but the elaboration and development of capitalism. Under the spectacle, use- and exchange- are not supplemented or supplanted, but are instead found in an ongoing dialectical transformation:

Use-value, which was implicitly included in exchange-value, has been so worn down by the overdeveloped market economy that in the inverted world of the spectacle it must be announced explicitly; a false life necessitates a pseudo-justification.

(thesis 48)

In Debord's account of this involution, the use-value that returns is plainly not that which was departed from. The utility of use-value as a pseudo-justification is not found in use, but being made 'explicit' rather than 'implicit,' and thereby taking a value in and from *display*. That Debord does not make this display-value itself explicit is no wonder: display-value does not take its place in a precession of values, but forms the condition

in which use- and exchange-value might occur: under the spectacle, social recognition arrives from being made explicit, *made to appear*.

By linking these accounts of display-value in Buck-Morss and Debord I mean to draw attention to the historical sense in which Benjamin's work informs Debord's, as well as the sublation in which the novelty of display Benjamin finds in the arcades is subsequently recognized as the condition at issue in *The Society of the Spectacle*. In doing so, what appears as a distinct element in Buck-Morss' account should be thought of as a particular approach to the larger question of spectacular society, one meant to concentrate certain elements of Debord's work. A particular form of display-value can be seen by returning to the last part of Debord's statement on the absolute fulfillment of commodity fetishism, where "[...] the sensuous world is replaced by a selection of images which exist above it, while at the same time, recognizing these images as the exemplar of sensuousness." (thesis 36) This account of the sensuous world, in which images are both above the world and exemplary of sensuous experience of the world, offers an account of the illusory world of fetishism as a subject under spectacle might encounter it. This presentation of the contradictions of spectacular fetishism is in contradistinction to thesis 22, which presents "modern society" as though from a remove that permits the observation that it remains "in contradiction with itself." This difference in what might provisionally be called 'perspective' is of particular importance for my project as the approach in thesis 36 brings sensuousness, which underlies my understanding of corporeality, into contact with fetishism and hence towards alienated bodies.

Spectacle and Fashion

Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* and the later *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* do not greatly concern themselves with matters of corporeality.

Nevertheless, following my major theme, the reworking of fetishism in accord with the dominance of the spectacle should have substantial implications for corporeality.

Perhaps a hint of these can be found when Debord discusses human life given over to the extremity of the spectacle's embrace:

The celebrity, as the spectacular representation of a living human, focuses on the image of a possible social role, and therefore focuses on a banality. The condition of celebrity is specialization in the *appearance of lived experience*, as the object of an identification with a shallow semblance of life, one that compensates for the fragmentation of actually lived productive specializations. These celebrities exist to represent the various styles of living and styles of understanding society, made available for general use. They embody the inaccessible outcome of social *labour* by mimicking the by-products of that labour, magically conveying these by-products above social labour, as its goal: *power* and *vacations*, the choices and consumption belonging to a process that, start to finish, is never disputed. On the one hand, governmental power is personalized as a pseudo-celebrity. On the other, the celebrity of consumption makes majority approval into a pseudo-power over the lived. But, in the same way that the

celebrity's activities are not really general, neither are they really varied. (thesis 60)

In its 'compensatory' capacity, celebrity participates in fetishism, offering a false reintegration into the society that alienated the worker. On one hand, as the vehicle of a 'possible role' in spectacular society, the celebrity serves to attach subjective qualities to the illusion of consumer choice. On the other, celebrities, those “admirable people, in whom the system is personified,” produce images of subjective experience, which are then offered up for a more general identification (thesis 61).

Of course, this identification is fetishistic, and the 'images of possible roles' are fetishes, objects that not only depict subjective activity, but are invested with it, engaged in social activity on behalf of those who attend to them. Similarly, although depicting an individual role, the unity offered by celebrity identification is not the unity of the individual:

The agent of the spectacle, placed on stage as a celebrity, is the opposite of an individual and, of course, the enemy of the individual in himself as in others. Passing into the spectacle as a model for identification, one renounces all aspects of autonomy in order to identify with the general law of obedience to the way of things. (thesis 61)

While this discussion has a number of highly suggestive elements, in terms of an understanding of spectacular corporeality it does not offer a great deal beyond identifications of an 'image of possible activity' and a 'semblance of life.'

In order to pursue this matter further, I find myself taking up a theme closer to corporeality, that of fashion, specifically that of clothing. This choice is motivated less by what *The Society of the Spectacle* offers on the subject, but by how Benjamin's work on fashion is addressed by Debord. This particular connection can be seen in two disputations with Benjamin's thought:

Beneath the apparent *fashions*, which cancel and recreate themselves on the futile surface of a contemplated pseudo-cyclic time, the *grand style* of the age is always found in whatsoever is guided by the necessity, both evident and concealed, of the revolution. (thesis 162)

This contrast of 'grand style' to mere 'fashion' involves looking beyond a temporality Debord glosses as 'pseudo-cyclic.' This temporality of fashion is also invoked, by way of its closure, in Debord's 1987 *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*:

The manufacture of a present where fashion itself, from clothes to music, has come to a halt, which wants to forget the past and no longer seems to believe in a future, is achieved by the ceaseless circularity of information, always returning to the same short list of trivialities, passionately proclaimed as major discoveries. (13)

In the first case, the time that is 'pseudo-cyclic' serves only a 'futile' display of activity, and in the second, even the possibility of such a cycle is stilled, as past and future fall out of memory and imagination. This suggests, albeit in a negative capacity, an understanding of fashion astride such a temporality, one that turns to memory and the past in order to imagine a future.

Of course, this accords with perhaps the foremost sense of fashion and temporality that Walter Benjamin develops in *The Arcades Project*:

Each time, what sets the tone is without doubt the newest, but only where it emerges in the medium of the oldest, the longest past, the most ingrained. This spectacle, the unique self-construction of the newest in the medium of what has been, makes for the true dialectical theater of fashion. (B1a,2)

Here is a fashion inseparable from its past yet always imagining the new. A close reading of this sense of fashion may inform the status of corporeality under spectacle, at least insofar as it clarifies what it is that has been foreclosed.

Fashion in the Arcades

In taking up this theorization of fashion, which is far ranging and no more complete than the *Arcades Project* itself, I wish to highlight three themes in Benjamin's presentation.

The first of these is Benjamin's regard for fashion as uniquely significant within commodity fetishism. He identifies a number of features that characterize fashion as commodity-par-excellence, including the deliberate flaunting of its commodity status, its 'ever-same' newness and novelty, and a built-in expiration date that requires discarding the exhausted look and purchasing the latest. These together give fashion a specific role in fetishism: "Fashion prescribes the ritual by which the commodity fetish demands to be worshiped" (*Arcades Project*, 8).

Fashion is frequently presented as the core and culmination of commodity fetishism in the *Arcades Project* and Benjamin's related texts. One oft-cited example of this is found in Benjamin's schematic notes outlining the 'hell of commodities':

Hell-Golden Age

Keywords for hell: ennui, gambling, pauperism

A canon of this dialectic: fashion

The golden age as catastrophe (*Arcades Project*, 906)

Here, the significance of fashion goes beyond its exemplary form of commodity exchange to the temporality it practices, and this encounter with time is the second theme I wish to emphasize. Benjamin observes that fashion breaks with a linear progression, returning to the past for inspiration and material before returning these to the present as newness.

This leads to the third and final element of fashion I deal with below, which is Benjamin's intertwining of fashion and death: how, on the one hand, the novelty and liveliness fashion brings forward from the past are never more than a moment ahead of their own obsolescence, and on the other, how this newness arrives in 'anorganic' or inorganic materials, and as the manifestation of dead labour in intimate contact with living flesh.

Benjamin: Fashion and Progress as Ideology

Forming a substantial theme amongst the unfinished work, Benjamin's writings on fashion are widely dispersed throughout *The Arcades Project*, as well as being found in a dense concentration in convolute B. Visiting even a few of these discussions reveals a certain lack of uniformity in Benjamin's thinking on fashion: this “paradox of

fashion” forms an impetus for Peter Wollen's 2003 “The Concept of Fashion in *The Arcades Project*” (138). Wollen identifies Benjamin's “inconsistent” approach:

[...] as he veered between viewing fashion, on the one hand, as a manifestation of commodity culture – or, more specifically, of commodity fetishism – and, on the other hand, as the manifestation of a long-repressed utopian desire, to be reenergized at a moment of historical awakening. (131)

In detailing this tension, Wollen looks to the garment industry in nineteenth century Paris, with a particular focus on the emergence of ready-to-wear clothes into a space formerly dominated by made-to order fashions (133-5). He uses this materialist account, with its implications for class and commodity, to ground Benjamin's concerns with “the psychology, phenomenology, and aesthetics of the consumption and display of clothing” (135). Drawing on this understanding of garments, custom made against mass produced, Wollen looks to Ernst Simmel's 1905 *The Philosophy of Fashion*, itself a source for Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*, to discern a dialectic of fashion in terms “of individual choice and of group psychology” (135):

The mechanics of fashion, it seems, follow a very similar pattern, a coincidence of the singular with the norm and the group, within which the individual is both singular *and* assimilated. (140)

Here it is possible to discern the outlines of an industrial fetishism in other terms, where individuality and sociality are only available in the false light of commodity exchange.

In Wollen's reading, the elevation of fashion, from one commodity amongst many to “the crucial element of the social superstructure,” is connected to its role in

Benjamin's 'dialectical image,' where fashion combines the twin concerns of commodity fetishism and utopianism. (139) Wollen's account for the dialectical image is drawn almost exclusively from *The Arcades Project*, particularly the passages K2,3 and K2,5. These are found in the convolute dedicated to “Dream City and Dream House, Dreams of the Future, Anthropological Nihilism, Jung,” in which the key term 'awakening' appears in a number of senses. These are not always the occasion of a liberation:

Fashion, like architecture, inheres in the darkness of the lived moment, belongs to the dream consciousness of the collective. The latter awakes, for example, in advertising. (K2a,4)

However, in the passage that Wollen looks to, Benjamin drives his understanding of historical materialism towards a specifically liberated “waking being” (K2,3). Aimed at overcoming the dream-like present, the dialectical image involves an eruption of the past, a “dialectical penetration and actualization of former contexts” (K2,3). This awakening of past potentials destroys “the ideology of progress,” as the dialectical image:

[...] puts the truth of all present action to the test. Or rather, it serves to ignite the explosive materials that are latent in what has been (the authentic figure of which is *fashion*). To approach, in this way, “what has been” means to treat it not historiographically, as heretofore, but politically, in political categories. (K2,3)

Wollen intercedes here, in his unfolding of Benjamin's thought, to observe that 'the ideology of fashion' is itself complicit in the 'ideology of progress':

[...] precisely because of its cyclical nature, its endless reiteration of novelty and obsolescence, each caught in an endlessly self-canceling relationship with the other.

(The Concept of Fashion, 138-9)

Wollen presents 'awakening' as the political means by which to break out of the 'endless self-cancellation' practiced by fashion:

Awakening releases the utopian desire that was contained in the dream, a desire that is particularly powerful within the dreamworld of fashion, the Janus-faced world of the "eternally up-to-date," from whose eternal recurrence the unique can only be rescued politically, through the recovery on reawakening of long-buried utopian dreams.²² (139)

Wollen presents Benjamin's fashion as an ongoing, cyclical process of commodity exchange, one that suppresses history, and even time, in its endless interplay of the new and the old. Wollen finds that politically awakening 'what has been' confronts fashion's ceaseless commodification as an obstacle that is to be overcome. However, once this cycle is broken, fashion remains as a highly concentrated store of the utopianism(s) of the past.²³ From this Wollen ascribes fashion its specificity in Benjamin's thought: "Fashion is the crucial element of the social superstructure, if we are to understand the significance of history in a nonprogressive manner" (139). From Wollen, fashion's

²² This quote concludes with Wollen's parenthetical directing the reader to 'See K2,3'.

²³ From here I will allow the matter of Benjamin's utopianisms to largely fall aside. While a fuller comprehension of these is a vital part in grasping Benjamin's later work, I am interested here in dragging his work forward, to see how it might inhabit a society dominated by the spectacle, which, not incidentally, forecloses the potential Benjamin discerns in fashion.

relation to time, the circularity that invokes the past and its utopian dreams only to suppress them in the commodity form, is then something akin to the guardian of the 'linear' 'empty' time that Benjamin railed against: fashion as a non-linear process in service to an ideological linear progress, protecting the slumbering dreams of the past.

Given Debord's usage of Benjamin, perhaps it is unsurprising to find certain notable similarities between Wollen's account of fashion and Debord's work. For one, a Benjaminian language of ideological sleep returns in *The Society of the Spectacle*:

Insofar as necessity is found in social dreams, such dreams become necessary. The spectacle is the bad dream of modern society in chains, which expresses nothing more than the wish to sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of this sleep. (thesis 21)

This should be contrasted to Wollen's reading of Benjamin, which presents fashion as collapsing time, preventing potentially revolutionary forces from waking, and producing a ceaseless stasis of self-cancelling commodity exchange. There is a difference in causality: Debord looks to the cessation of fashion in 'the ceaseless circularity of information,' while Wollen sees the 'endless self-canceling' in fashion. Debord locates the end of fashion in the negation of past and future, in the “construction of a present [...] which wants to forget the past and no longer gives the impression of believing in a future,” while Wollen identifies fashion as that which practices the negation of past and future. (*Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, 13)

In view of this ambiguity, I think it is clear that the fashion Debord sees as having *stopped* under the spectacle is not that which Wollen discerns, as Wollen's presentation of fashion would be entirely at home in a society of the spectacle.

Benjamin: Fashion and *tigersprung*

Ulrich Lehman's *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity* presents an account of “philosophical ideas in sartorial fashion” from Baudelaire through the first half of the twentieth century, with a particular emphasis on Benjamin's work, and on fashion within Benjamin's thought (xii). Lehman is, for example, confident to revisit *The Arcades Project* as being entirely centered on fashion: “By 1939, fashion had already changed from being just one element of nineteenth-century cultural history to the essence of the *Arcades Project*” (206). What is more, Lehman titles his work after a quotation found in Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, specifically the fourteenth thesis, quoted here in part as Lehman renders it, with his modifications to the translation:

The French Revolution regarded itself as Rome reincarnate. It quoted ancient Rome as fashion quotes a past attire. Fashion has the scent of the modern where it stirs in the thicket of what has been. It is the tiger's leap into the past. Yet this leap occurs in an arena commanded by the ruling class. The very same leap in the open air of history is the dialectical one, which Marx has understood as the revolution.

(Quoted in Lehman, xvi, published in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zhon, modified by Lehman)

Lehman places great emphasis on *tigersprung*, the tiger's leap to the past, in which the “apparent opposition between the eternal and the ephemeral is rendered obsolete” (xviii). Key to his account of the historical possibilities of fashion, Lehman seeks to join

Benjamin's account of the dialectical image (discussed above, found in K2,3) and the tiger's leap: "If coupled with the dialectical image, the tiger's leap 'in the open air of history' marks a convergence that is revolutionary in essence" (xviii). In line with this revolutionary potential of this "novel view on historical development," Lehman sees Benjamin positioning fashion "as a social force – a stylistic revolution sharing the same cultural features with a political one" (xviii).

Lehman pursues his development of the tiger's leap through associations with other of Benjamin's ideas. Here, for example, in language distinctly reminiscent of Benjamin's discussion in K2,3, Lehman ties the revolutionary character of the tiger's leap to

[...] the concept of the "dialectical image" in which the explosive within history is ignited and subsequently blasts the very foundations of historicism. As this explosive is fashion, it becomes apparent that fashion is the indispensable catalyst for both remembrance and a new political – that is, materialist – concept of history. (210)

In this combination, the non-linear leap to the past touches upon the suppressed potential found there, opening new possible futures and awakening the present.

These are not the only ideas blended here: I think it is important to note that Lehman's consideration of fashion folds a number of senses into the understanding of 'fetish.' While basing his discussion in commodity fetishism, Lehman also introduces the psychoanalytic, by way of a Freudian reading of Baudelaire, and subsequently adds

an anthropological understanding as well. (224) As my project aims to follow the materialist account, care must be taken in approaching this portion of Lehman's work.

Lehman's account finds that the dialectical image, whether it is practiced under the dominance of capital or 'in the open air of history,' involves a body politic cast in images. Recounting a scene from *The Arcades Project* in which “the flâneur becomes captivated by the image of the woman”:

Here one finds the poetic in the historical, since the writer recounts the situation to a reader, and the eternal within the transitory.

Constellations like the above were defined by Benjamin, in an aestheticization of Marx's theorem, as “dialectical images.” (227)

Here Lehman establishes a critical difference as to the ground on which Benjamin's thinking of fashion and revolution is founded. The dialectical image and its partner, the tiger's leap, do not take up aesthetic forms of modernity, as typified by fashion, in order to point the way to a materialist revolution. Instead, revolutionary thought is taken up and framed by aesthetic modernity, becoming a movement that proceeds according to the logic of sartorial fashion.

This spectacular politics, based on an idealized historical return, presents a host of difficulties to a historical materialist tendency. Perhaps this informs Lehman's indications that Benjamin's thought should be taken as metaphysical or philosophical, while nevertheless avoiding invocations of Benjamin's own utopianism. Even with these caveats, this approach would produce a political philosophy of sartorial fashion, a political dimension within an aesthetic practice, one that avoids a theological register in favour of an idealistic one. This is indeed the role Lehman presents for Benjamin:

Whether there was to be a logical progression to the “open air of history” to allow the tiger to take the dialectical leap that would result in revolution, or the open air was meant to be a transient, utopian concept that would lead toward messianic redemption, the significance of the leap is the same, lying in its poetic and provocative idea. (278)

Lehman's book takes Benjamin's contribution as a means to a political content to a corpus of fashion derived from Baudelaire. This tiger's leap does not then radicalize, but only extends, the parade of fashion.

In the above quotation, Lehman's account clearly recognizes certain limits of Benjamin's tiger's leap. Nevertheless, Lehman also provides much in the way of justifications and legitimating associations for the politics he connects to the tiger's leap. One such line of discussion connects Benjamin's 'leap' with Engel's invocation of a revolutionary 'leap,' in but one instance of an argument found throughout Lehman's account, where one

[...] could surmise that Engel's challenge is geared toward social liberation, while the Benjaminian one rather concerns itself with an attack in the realm of theory. Whether the *Tigersprung* of the late 1930s thus had earned its stripes by progressive development from its origin in the mid-nineteenth century appears debatable. Is it not once again the dreaded victory of style over substance? Or has fashion's ever-changing appearance rather become not only the pacesetter but the very essence of modernity, so that any attack on

it implicitly shakes the very foundation of the capitalist system that
had generated it? (244-45)

This suggestion of a critical, or even revolutionary possibility turns upon fashion being elevated from an exceptional form of commodification to 'the very essence of modernity': fashion will avoid the 'dreaded victory' of appearance and take on substance only where it has come to take hold upon that which has created it, and to 'implicitly' shake it to its core. This establishes fashion in the form of a weak spot, or an exposed conduit, one deeply connected to matters beyond surface concerns with novelty and style.

Without speculating as to what might be required for such an inversion of production to take place, this understanding of fashion, unlike Wollen's, might better resemble that of Debord. Certainly, nothing of Lehman's presentation of fashion could operate where past and future are unavailable. However, the significance of the tiger's leap being stopped under the spectacle does not appear to extend beyond the credence accorded to its 'poetic and provocative idea.'²⁴

Benjamin: Fashion and Mythic History

While Lehman, with his project of sartorial fashion, comes to *The Arcades Project* as a work structured entirely by concerns with fashion, Susan Buck-Morss' *The Dialectics of Seeing*, which takes *The Arcades Project* as its object, subordinates fashion to one aspect of one part of the larger work. Buck-Morss' approach deploys a

²⁴ Herbert Blau's *Nothing in Itself: Complexities of Fashion*, in its treatment of the Arcades Project, suggests that it is a disappointment with just such a promise of fashion that may be of use: "As Benjamin observed, where fantasy attached itself to the abandoned glamour of the nineteenth century, confrontation with fashion could make the heart sink, but precisely in that sinking feeling, he quite poignantly felt, was a paradisaical source of energy available for political life." (111) Here, it is the 'dissipation' of fashion's utopian promise, and not the promise itself, that is potentially of political significance: not Lehman's 'poetic and provocative idea', but its inadequacy, or tragic mode.

number of schematizations, chief among them “this notion that Benjamin thought in coordinates,” even going on to “suggest that a pattern of coordinates functions as the invisible structure” of the work. (210) Within one such coordinate system, Buck-Morss lays out the contradictions and extremities of the commodity along axes of “dream” opposite “waking” and “petrified nature” contra “transitory nature” (211, Display D). The quadrant located between 'dream' and 'petrified nature' is identified as “mythic history: fetish (phantasmagoria),” and Buck-Morss describes this corner in terms by now familiar:²⁵

The *fetish* is the keyword of the commodity as mythic phantasmagoria, the arrested form of history. It corresponds to the reified form of new nature, condemned to the modern Hell of the new as the always-the-same. But this fetishized phantasmagoria is also the form in which the human, socialist potential of industrial nature lies frozen, awaiting the collective political action that could awaken it. (211)

And indeed, fashion is found within this register of 'mythic history.'

Where Wollen gives fashion a particular preeminence in *The Arcades Project*, and is hardly the only author to do so, Buck-Morss arranges it alongside a variety of other elements in common cause:²⁶

The *Passagen-Werk* is fundamentally concerned with debunking mythic theories of history whatever form their scenarios may take

²⁵ The other quadrants are “historical nature: ruin,” “natural history: fossil” and “mythic nature: wish image” (211, Display D).

²⁶ As below, Buck-Morss uses the German name for Benjamin's text.

– inevitable catastrophe no less than continuous improvement. But Benjamin was most persistent in his attack against the myth of automatic historical progress. (79)

This is the 'ideology of progress' noted by Wollen, and in its many and varied manifestations, that which Buck-Morss terms “the phantasmagoria of progress” (82). She arranges these varied phantasms into a “panorama” of “that construction of history which Benjamin's own, dialectically constructed images were designed to interrupt” (82-3). Buck-Morss' “tour” of these images of progress includes, amongst others, “Arcades,” “World Expositions,” “Phantasmagoria of Politics” and “Urbanism” (83-9). Arrayed against these ideological forms are these dialectical images, which Buck-Morss finds “rubbed harshly against the grain” of progress (92): “Dust,” “Fragility,” “Sterility,” “Death,” “Chthonic Paris,” “Recurrence,” “Sin,” “Boredom,” and “Fashion” (95-104).

Buck-Morss opens a number of lines of thought in discussing fashion's role against the ideology of progress. For her project, perhaps the most significant comes as a contrast: on the one hand, a fashion that typifies the promise of progress:

Interpreted affirmatively, modern fashion is irreverent toward tradition, celebratory of youth rather than social class, and thus emblematic of social change. (97-8)

And on the other, fashion's recurrent demise in the grip of market exchange:

Reified in commodities, the utopian promise of fashion's transitoriness undergoes a dialectical reversal: The living, human

capacity for change and infinite variation becomes alienated, and is affirmed only as a quality of the inorganic object. (99)

Seeing as this process leads to the 'Hell of commodities,' it might be tempting to narrate a fall-into-damnation for fashion. Indeed, Buck-Morss likens the “effect on collective historical memory of satisfying the thirst for novelty through fashion” to drinking from the river Lethe (98). However, it is not a tragedy that Buck-Morss presents. Instead, she ties this loss of historical memory to her understanding of the phantasmagoria of progress, “which can only be sustained by forgetting what has happened” (95, parenthesis removed).

Buck-Morss identifies fashion's power against the ideology of progress in a negativity and an awakening, which arises from our encounter with the absurdity of the ever-new and the inhumanity of commodification: “Benjamin makes us *see* it, in revealing the logic of modernity as 'the time of Hell'” (99).

Here, in Buck-Morss' formulation, I find an account of fashion that has a definite consequence and specific role under the spectacle. Debord's account of the 'halt' of fashion involves a society that no longer looks to a future and desires to forget the past: Benjamin's discussion of fashion clearly depends upon a past to return to and future to propose. A lack of these might well be enough to halt fashion. However, Buck-Morss' work points towards the ways that fashion involves a (re)creation of past and future, as its non-linearity opens a possibility of encounter with one's historicity that is otherwise unavailable. Benjamin identifies something of this by way of the erotics of past fashions:

A definitive perspective on fashion follows solely from the consideration that to each generation the one immediately preceding it seems the most radical anti-aphrodisiac imaginable.

(B1a,4)

It is this type of concern, where one's own historicity is made plain in the materiality of commodified fashion, that leads Benjamin to observe:

Thus, the confrontation with the fashions of previous generations is a matter of far greater importance than we ordinarily suppose. And one of the most significant aspects of historical costuming is that – above all, in the theatre – it undertakes such a confrontation.

(B1a,4)

Unlike previous accounts, where fashion sits atop a forgotten store of utopian energies, here a 'confrontation' between the material imaginations of times past is located in a store of costumes.

Which venue best serves this confrontation? Buck-Morss begins her chapter on mythic history with a methodological and metaphorical 'panorama' of phantasmagoria, “replicating the principle of panoramic representation,” which she likens to “moving down a street of commodity display windows,” in order to better highlight the constructions of history Benjamin had set himself against (82). Where this serves for the parade of images of progress, Buck-Morss does not specify a different locale for the dialectical images meant to refuse those of the panorama. And while it certainly does not account for all the images Buck-Morss discusses, perhaps Benjamin's identification of the theatre will serve for fashion, at least. If fashion does indeed take part in

producing the past and future which it addresses, then it must take a role in the theatre that maintains a store of fashions past, and then also in opening the place in which these might be brought to critical confrontation. Allow me then to consider the corporeality that attends the theatrical confrontation of fashions past and present.

Benjamin: Fashion and Death

Buck-Morss' presentation of fashion repeatedly touches on corporeality, where it is fashion that:

[...] embodies the changed relationship between subject and object that results from the “new” nature of commodity production. In fashion, the phantasmagoria of commodities presses closest to the skin.

Now clothing is quite literally at the borderline between subject and object, the individual and the cosmos. (97)

While Buck-Morss is careful in the terms of her analysis, here she touches on a theme within Benjamin's understanding of fashion where he blends the fetishism of commodity with that of a psycho-sexual understanding. The text provides a number of descriptions of such an encounter with death, as might be found in the very first entry in convolute B, “And boredom is the grating before which the courtesan teases death” (B1,1). Or, in another passage that more explicitly couples these two fetishes:

Here fashion has opened the business of dialectical exchange between woman and ware – between carnal pleasure and the corpse. The clerk, death, tall and loutish, measures the century by the yard, serves as mannequin himself to save costs, and manages

single-handedly the liquidation that in French is called *révolution*.

For fashion was never anything other than the parody of the motley cadaver, provocation of death through the woman, and bitter colloquy with decay whispered between shrill bursts of mechanical laughter. That is fashion. And that is why she changes so quickly; she titillates death and is already something different, something new, as he casts about to crush her. (B1,4)

Buck-Morss identifies Benjamin's understanding of fashion-as-female on a number of levels. The first of these is the observation that Paris was of central importance to women's fashions. Another is the contrast between a nineteenth-century understanding of pre-industrial female fecundity and the technical achievements of mechanical production: "Death and decay, no longer simply a part of organic life, are thrown up at the woman as a special punishment or fate" (99). The life of fashion, in its novelty, is tied to the circulation of inorganic forms: this fetishism is not in direct conflict with an organic 'essence' of women's fertility, for it effaces and overtakes it. Buck-Morss observes the inversions arising from this shift:

Clothes mimic organic nature [...] whereas the living, human body mimics the inorganic world (skin strives through cosmetics to attain the color of rose taffeta; crinoline skirts turn women into "triangles" or "X"s, or "walking bells"). (100-1)

This is from Buck-Morss' entry "Sterility," which follows "Fashion," and sees the qualities of life and liveliness, as taken up in commodity fetishism, shifting the locus of sex and sterility:

In the process of displacing nature's transiency onto commodities, the life force of sexuality is displaced there as well. For what is it that is desired? No longer the human being: Sex appeal emanates from the clothes that one wears. Humanity is what you hang your hat on. (100)

Here, the commodity undertakes the social activity of sexuality on our behalf, and humanity serves as a hatstand, a body as a mannequin, in support of the inorganic social agent. This also serves to clarify the sense of an- or inorganic materials: materials that might very well once have been organic, but that have been rendered sterile, outside a biological sense of life and death, by the processing that leads to their commodification. In doing so, of course, these materials are now suited to take up the commodity fetish, that false appearance of life which Marx called 'necromantic' and Debord named “the autonomous movement of non-life” (thesis 2, trans. Nicholson-Smith).

This is not the limit of fashion's intrusion into the domain formerly reserved for the organic, as Benjamin attests in the 'early version' of the Exposé of 1935:

Fashion always stands in opposition to the organic. Not the body but the corpse is the most perfect object for its art. It defends the rights of the corpse before the living being, which it couples to the inorganic world. [...] On the other hand, it is precisely fashion that triumphs over death. It brings the departed with it into the present.

Fashion is contemporary with every past. (*Arcades Project*, 894)²⁷

²⁷ The exposés are extracts and revisions of selections from *The Arcades Project*, meant for publication before the entirety was complete. In this particular case, a very similar passage to that quoted can be found in (B9,1): “Every fashion stands in opposition to the organic. Every fashion couples the living body to the inorganic world. To the living, fashion defends the rights of the corpse.”

The invocation of death here is not incidental, as Benjamin writes of 'the departed' saved by fashion, for these are elements of forms so far gone as to not even be unfashionable. Having once been fashionable, then less so, then disused, then discarded, then 'dead' and forgotten, now fashion returns to the past to 'triumph over death' by recalling and revitalizing that which was inorganic then and remains so now. The triumph of fashion over death, under the regime of commodity exchange, does not extend to the human, but only the inorganic appearance of the human.

On the other hand, aside from this triumph, which addresses the dead fashions of the past, fashion continues to stage an encounter with death in the present: Benjamin maintains that death, as opposed to birth, is a social circumstance (B9,2). Clothing, as commodity, engages in sexuality, liveliness and death on our behalf, drawing us along, into the inorganic, trying to avoid death. 'Teasing,' 'provoking,' 'titillating,' fashion runs ahead of unconquered death again and again, leading to a corporeality that, on the one hand, takes its cues from the fashion of the moment: "Hallmark of the period's fashions: to intimate a body that never knows full nakedness" (B3,1). And on the other, takes its form from the procedures of fashion:

The detailing of feminine beauties so dear to the poetry of the Baroque, a process in which each single part is exalted through a trope, secretly links up with the image of the corpse. This parceling out of feminine beauty into its noteworthy constituents resembles a dissection, and the popular comparisons of bodily parts to alabaster, snow, precious stones, or other (mostly inorganic) formations makes the same point. (B9,3)

Here, beauty emerges, as a piecemeal entry into the inorganic alongside a 'dissection' by way of poetry: in her discussion of "Death," which follows "Sterility," Buck-Morss connects the above quotation with another from convolute B to again liken bodies with mannequins: "Just as the much-admired mannequin has detachable parts, so fashion encourages the fetishistic fragmentation of the living body" (101). Which sense of 'fetishistic' is meant here is not altogether clear, but both that of the commodity and the psychological might serve. What requires emphasis here is that this fragmentation is not that identified by Marx and discussed in my first chapter. Though surely industrial labour and its specializations draw human life and activity into the inorganic, the circumstances are not precisely the same with fashion. The fragments of the mannequin-corpse or fashion-corporeality are not appendages of a machine. Instead, the alienation of one's own objective being and its augmentation with the activity of fashion presents the various parts of oneself as a collection of inorganic images, objects dominated by their display-value, which live and die with the passage of fashion.

Spectacular Corporeality

At a first approach, a spectacular corporeality drawn from this account would then be an organization of human activity and capacities which serves as mannequin, in order to better support the circulation of images that are required for social recognition and which participate in social activity on our behalf. Of course, drawing this Benjaminian account into the spectacle requires attending to the cessation of fashion and the emergence of the spectacle as the organizing form for bodies, which in turn revise this corporeality in a number of ways.

The particular characteristics of corporeality under fashion that require reevaluation under spectacle are:

- The temporality of fashion set against mythic histories
- The dominant object form for commodification
- Forgetting and fashion
- The role of clothing as a borderline
- The gendered scene of fashion: the courtesan and death
- Fashion's triumph over death
- The possibility of a material confrontation revealing historicity

Fashion, as Buck-Morss reads Benjamin, is arrayed against mythic history, in particular the ideology of automatic progress. The temporality associated with fashion is a crucial element of this resistance, as the leap to the past to recover materials from which to create a future defies the linearity and succession of forms that characterized the narratives of progress that concerned Benjamin. However, where the spectacle already holds sway, such a narrative of progress is no longer the ideological danger Benjamin discerned, and the “pseudo-cyclic” time of fashion is not only incapable of resistance, but is itself a mythification, a “futile surface” that obscures the spectacular present (thesis 162). In passing from the arcades to the spectacle, the counter-ideological aspect of fashion is inverted, and spectacular corporeality is, unsurprisingly, given over to the maintenance and development of the spectacle.

When and where sartorial fashion is found to be the dominant object form, as it is in Benjamin's account of the arcades as both hell and golden-age, it is clothing and associated 'decorative' items that are the exemplars from which other commodities take

their form. However, the dominant object form under the spectacle is not clothing, but image. This shift does not break with the sense of mannequin-as-corporeality, but lessens it, as one amongst many, in recognition of a wider range of mediating technologies for bodies and appearances. In particular, the next chapter moves away from mannequins towards corporeality as a surface (as in a movie theatre or blue-screen) or a screen (specifically, a laptop screen).

The role of forgetting in the transition from fashion to spectacle is relatively straightforward. Buck-Morss finds that the ideology of progress requires historical forgetting in order to proceed, but in Debord's account, the spectacle operates to forget in a far grander and more thorough-going capacity. Insofar as historical forgetting is only intensified under the spectacle, then the cessation of fashion is no more or less than the foreclosure of any 'tiger's leap' possibility to disrupt this ideological sleep.

As discussed above, Buck-Morss identifies clothing in its closeness “to the skin,” such that it is “quite literally at the borderline between subject and object, the individual and the cosmos” (97). In drawing Benjamin's fashion into a corporeality suited to Debord's spectacle, this 'borderline' is pushed further, onto the skin or whatever surface subject to visibility presents itself.²⁸

Much like the mannequin as the mediating technology of fashion, Benjamin's gendered scene of fashion, where the female courtesan teases and runs before the male figure of death, becomes but one scenario amongst many. This results turns on the

²⁸ A different approach to spectacular corporeality, one that engages concerns beyond those that occupied Benjamin's account, might proceed by considering practices such as skin-whitening, the history of which is often traced to Elizabethan England before serving to organize globally dispersed markets and commodities in service to white supremacy. The spectacle, in its totalizing character, does not mark the end of such oppressive identifications and commodifications, only their generalization and mandatory practice.

changing sense of the corpse which fashion takes as primary. Under the spectacle, the 'autonomous movement' of the non-living is not recognized as death, but, in the spectacular commodity form, as the sensuous exemplar of life as well as a life that exists above the world. Here, the social activity which commodities undertake on our behalf is extended to the appearance of life and living activity, by taking up and exceeding the process in which Buck-Morss identifies the “life force of sexuality” being displaced onto commodities (100). Where what Benjamin apprehended as a corpse is presented as life the spectacle reigns, and the courtesan-before-the-clerk is only one gendered accounting of the relationship between fashion and commodity. To be clear, this does not render the spectacle and its fetishism somehow outside or prior to gender, but instead produces a spectacular corporeality that might be made to matter according to any of a multitude of gendered scenarios. These gendered possibilities for organizing bodies are of course, not a matter of free play, but of social regulation and definition.

This transition, where the corpse returns as liveliness and living speaks to the qualitative difference between Benjamin's fashion and Debord's spectacle in their respective triumphs in regards to death. Fashion triumphed in the arcades by outrunning death, stealing that from the past which belonged to death and returning it to life in the present. Of course, this triumphal rescue and resuscitation only operated on the commodified materials of fashion, those inorganic elements that could take on the false life of commodity fetishism. Benjamin saw in this triumph that fashion both “couples the living body to the inorganic world” while it “defends the rights of the corpse” (B9,1). This triumph over death, bound up with, but inaccessible to the living, pales before that which the spectacle enacts. Recalling thesis 17, “[i]t is only insofar as

individuality is negated that it is permitted to appear”, so too the qualities of human life are negated. In order to be permitted accession to the appearance, which is social being and becoming under the spectacle, liveliness arrives by way of fetishism. The spectacle triumphs in regard to death not by escaping or stealing from it, but by this negation, so that the appearance of life is exemplified by the autonomous movement of the inorganic image. This spectacular corporeality, conceived in and of image, defends the rights of fetishistic life against itself.

Chapter Four – Broadcast Bodies: Freya Olafson's *Avatar* and *Hyper_*

In the previous chapter, I discussed both corporeality and Brechtian realism under Debord's spectacle. In this chapter, I pick up both of these threads and bring them into contact with Freya Olafson's inter-media performances, *AVATAR* (2009-ongoing) and *HYPER_* (2013). I look to the specificities of Olafson's works in order to suggest two different lines of possibility for critical performance under the spectacle.

My thinking on spectacular corporeality owes much to Olafson's work. When I returned to Winnipeg to complete my dissertation, I had the opportunity to watch Olafson's *AVATAR* in my capacity as the production manager at Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers (WCD), who featured this work as the first show of their 2009-10 season. Although her work emerges from a different set of concerns from my project, her accomplishment in this piece expanded my thinking and provided concrete moments with which to reconsider my efforts. While continuing to perform *AVATAR*, both on tour and in translation, Olafson developed *HYPER_*, further developing the range of her critical encounters with embodiment and digital technologies.

Here I discuss both works, within a specific framing of my concerns with Brechtian critical practices and corporeality, looking towards the possibilities her work suggests. Considering the range of Olafson's source materials and performance techniques, my reading is partial and does not aim at a comprehensive account. Nevertheless, *AVATAR* and *HYPER_* both demand substantial and valuable extensions of my thinking, and I believe my account does attend to the critical framework and corporeal engagement with images that are present in the work.

I begin with a brief overview of *AVATAR* and a discussion of the work in terms of spectacular corporeality. I conclude this first part of the chapter with the possibility of a critical drag performance of spectacular celebrity. The second half of the chapter moves on to an overview of *HYPER_* and a discussion of 'complex seeing,' one of Brecht's critical terms, as developed by Raymond Williams.

Archival Access to *AVATAR* and *HYPER_*

With the kind permission of the artist, archival recordings of *AVATAR* and *HYPER_* have been made available for academic purposes. All images for this chapter are courtesy Freya Olafson.

An archival video of *AVATAR* can be found at:

<http://vimeo.com/53473834>

password: avatarfull

The recording of *HYPER_* is available at:

<https://vimeo.com/74473736>

password: hyper_

Part I: An Overview of *AVATAR*

In 2009, *AVATAR* was produced at Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers with lighting and projection design by Hugh Conacher, receiving its fullest mounting to date. Here, the stage is set with a large screen and white flooring of the same width as the screen. Black curtains are drawn up around the screen. The stage contains a small computer cart with a stool, both on wheels. The cart is laden with Olafson's equipment, primarily her laptop and a video camera aimed at the laptop user, and is connected to a long bundle of cables, such that the cart and stool can move around the stage. In

particular, the arrangement of the open laptop is mirrored on the stage by the large screen at the back and matching white flooring. This large screen is illuminated from the rear by a digital projector, while the floor is the locus of three similar projectors, each of which is equipped with a movable mirror that is capable of directing its images around the stage. In particular, when Olafson sits before her screen, we sit before a grand projection of her perspective, seeing her as she sees and is seen by her array of devices.

Olafson enters upstage, at the rear of the theatre, from behind the large screen and curtains. As she approaches the screen, to the sound of recorded footsteps, she is first visible as a shadow cast on the screen by the rear projector. She slips past the curtain and advances to face the video camera as the voice from a found video blog on YouTube plays. The audio begins with an a familiar trope from such videos, an apology for not having posted an update for sometime. The images from the camera projected onto the screen, and Olafson's swaying dance is repeated behind her with a slight processing delay, in a 'hall of mirrors' effect. This moment also makes clear that in the transfer from the stage to the screen, video is flipped left to right: as Olafson shifts to the right, the first image behind her mirrors her movement to the left, the one behind it to the right, and so on, towards the suggested infinite regress. She experiments with taking pictures of herself through the camera and laptop, both portraits and in motion. She repeats the key strokes and jumps to the screen over and again until she adequately captures the look she wants, and then turns to experimenting with different filters and distortion effects built into the software. These first moments conclude with a rapid fire show of the photos already on her laptop, pictures of friends, family and trips. These

pictures are different from those that are to come, in that they seem personal, not meant for an expansive anonymous audience; somehow, these more personal photos are not 'social media.'

With this 'pre-social media' prelude completed, the first movement of *AVATAR* might be characterized as experiment and failure, as initial and uncertain forays into the narcissism and isolation of a digital life. Olafson draws on monologues from found video on YouTube to produce almost all the text and spoken material in *AVATAR*. Perched before the camera with her hair in her eyes, playing a part as if too shy to look into the camera (fig. 1), her first lines are an awkward, confessional 'first post', testifying to frustrated desires and discomfort in being, both on- and off-line. This first part of *AVATAR* develops towards catastrophe, as the not-yet-power-user is driven out of her cyber-space by malware and 'desktop strippers.' These animated images of women, meant to titillate a male audience and advertise more explicit materials for sale, repeat their limited set of movements with an animated and inhuman fluidity, in a stark contrast to Olafson's increasingly pained and restricted motion. Unable to regain control of her technology from these better adapted digital invaders, errors proliferate, and a system crash inevitably results.

The second phase of *AVATAR* enacts a process of development and rebuilding, as Olafson's body and activity, along with the physical circumstances on stage, are submitted to review and expert advice. Olafson pulls back a section of curtain to reveal a wall made of two panels of unpainted plywood, the texture of which contrasts the

smooth plastic that dominates the stage. A voice-over plays, taken from a blog video giving advice on how best to produce blog videos. Olafson follows these instructions, particularly point 'number three', which instructs her to use a 'solid colored backdrop' (fig. 2). Crucially, the color of blue Olafson uses for a solid background is set as a chromakey on her laptop's image processing software, such that it acts a bluescreen when captured on camera and projected onto the larger screen. As Olafson paints a solid color on the plywood, the projected image substitutes a series of images of bathrooms, each establishing a different visual depth. Olafson only paints enough of the plywood wall as needed to roughly cover the area captured by her camera: the remainder, still visible to the audience, plays no part in the projected image, and is left plain.

Olafson then sits and with deliberate mistiming, lip-(de)synchs to the audio from another instructional video, this one belonging to the genre 'how to get my look.' In particular, Olafson applies makeup over her eyelids to form new, wide-open but sightless eyes, and conducts the remainder of the performance with her own eyes mostly closed, her gaze surreptitiously cast down onto the keyboard. Olafson adds a short blonde wig and, again following instructions, uses makeup to add a 'natural', enthusiastic smile (fig. 3).

Thus remade and ready, Olafson returns to an online space, advertising herself as 1-800-AVA-STAR. At first confident in her new look and techniques, a cacophony of phone calls leads to Olafson to a disturbing encounter in the segment *A/S/L*. Named after the online chat abbreviation asking for a users age, sex and location, this scene is projected as a binocular view of two fisheye 'peep hole' lenses. One peep-hole shows the current activity, as Olafson, presumably as part of an online encounter, awkwardly

strips down to her underwear. The other projected image shows a similar action, one prerecorded in Olafson's studio. Since *AVATAR*'s premiere, Olafson has adapted this portion of the piece into a live duet with ChatRoulette.²⁹

The final phase of *AVATAR* shifts the blue screen background to a bedroom image, one with the sterile and perfect layout of a promotional advertisement. Olafson embarks on a renewed round of reconfigurations her body, following the audio of a 'watch me shrink' video. In this form, the author asks her friends' advice and support as she plans a weight loss program to be documented on YouTube. Here, Olafson draws lines on her body with a black wax pencil, as if preparing for radical cosmetic surgery, and then undertakes that surgery in a cosmetic fashion, through the application of the chromakey blue paint. Having trimmed her waist, she proceeds to give herself a six-pack of abs, then an exaggerated heart-shaped heart, before removing her collar bone and upper torso, which leaves her head detached. The background shifts to a YouTube page, and the fully emerged avatar greets the audience and takes their questions, speaking through a microphone that shifts Olafson's voice into a husky theatrical timbre (fig. 4 and fig. 5). The avatar speaks with the optimistic certainty and self-assurance that the earlier monologues lack, having embraced the positivity of self-advertisement in a society of spectacle.

²⁹ ChatRoulette is a video chat service that connects users randomly. It is best known for containing a preponderance of anonymous male users who show themselves masturbating.

***AVATAR* and Alienation**

She says: 'I post so I am'

- Pit Schultz, *The Producer as Power User*

Can you see me? Can you see me?

- Freya Olafson, *Avatar*

Olafson took Pit Schultz's "The Producer as Power User" as an early source of material for developing *AVATAR*, and adopted his revision of the Cartesian cogito as a 'mantra' for her work. Where Schultz observes that "[t]he order which controls the life of the power user derives from a computerised form of self-discipline", Olafson takes the activity involved in establishing and practicing this species of 'self-discipline' as her subject of investigation (114). Schultz enumerates the tasks attending the power user's "ego design process", "the reconfigurations, explorations and improvements" that inflect a moment-to-moment undercurrent in Olafson's performance, an account of what she is doing even as she is doing something else (116). Schultz's description of the activity of power user and the various masteries required offers a good sense of the material that Olafson takes up, theatricalizes, and comes to critical engagement with:

As the power user forms a quasi-autonomous unit with her machines, the quality of her production is at first only measured by herself. The tasks of administration and maintaining, self-employment and constant re-education, configuring and repairing, testing and improving, applies at first only to the systems of an extended self, not driven by an autopoietic 'l'art pour l'art' but a

self-sufficient digital craftsmanship aiming at the expansion and optimisation of the entirety of the productive process. (116)

If this serves as a first impression of the initial circumstances of *AVATAR*, and even of the activity of the characters Olafson portrays, her critical engagement stems from her interrogation of the procedures required of the emerging power user, and the corporeal consequences of this activity.

As such, a brief account of Schultz's work provides a background on which to register Olafson's interventions. Schultz's article reworks Benjamin's 1934 "The Author as Producer." Where Benjamin's piece opens with an epigraph from Ramon Fernandez on bringing intellectuals into common cause with the working class, Schultz's begins with an epigraph from Benjamin's text:

The apparatus will be the better the more consumers it brings in contact with the production process – in short, the more readers or spectators it turns into collaborators. (qtd in Schultz (111))

The selective precision of this quote elides a number of major differences between Benjamin and Schultz's treatment. The first is that Benjamin immediately makes it clear that it is Brecht's epic theatre that he is thinking of here, while Schultz, for his part, immediately offers a footnote that references Brecht's "Der Dreigroschenprozess" (*The Threepenny Lawsuit*) in support of his opening assertion that "[w]ithin the circumstances of today's media networks it is impossible not to produce" (111).

Schultz's quotation also alters the sense of collaborators and collaboration in Benjamin's work. Schultz takes the conversion of consumers into media producers as an inescapable condition of 'media networks.' The sense of collaboration here is that of the

creative collaboration, or perhaps more specifically, of the well known 'network effect,' by which a network's value is understood to grow exponentially with a linear increase in the number of users. However, in Benjamin's text, the sense of collaborator arrives explicitly out of the act of a committed author, who engages their work politically as a call to revolutionary organization. Here I quote the passage in Benjamin's text that precedes Schultz's selection, in the translation by Edmund Jephcott:

The best political tendency is wrong if it does not demonstrate the attitude with which it is to be followed. And this attitude the writer can demonstrate only in his particular activity – that is, in writing. A political tendency is a necessary but never sufficient condition for the organizing function of a work. This further requires a directing, instructing stance on the part of the writer. And today this must be demanded more than ever before. *An author who teaches writers nothing teaches no one.* What matters, therefore, is the exemplary character of production, which is able, first, to induce other producers to produce, and, second, to put an improved apparatus at their disposal. (89)

Benjamin's collaboration here is that which aims towards revolution, and the 'improvement of the apparatus' is meant to educate, inspire, and direct a contribution towards collective political organization. Schultz's constellation does not admit revolution as an operating concern,³⁰ and the account he offers could be critically

³⁰ “The Producer as Power User” does offer a single mention of revolution, in passing, and as part of a vacillation in a vortex: “The ambiguity of this low end info-communism in the eye of the hurricane of world wide integrated capitalism, has become one of the major resources of the neo-liberal knowledge economy and can be described as both revolutionary and reactionary.” (114)

regarded as a reification of Benjamin's: where the earlier author saw a possibility of social activity, as an author might open a means to revise and radicalize authorship in the light of capitalist production, Schultz offers an impersonal mechanical process in which media networks have taken on the role of education and direction, a process that is ostensibly both depoliticized and inescapable. And where Benjamin ended his piece with a restatement of class struggle, the phantom presence of commodity fetishism becomes the dominant logic of Schultz's conclusion. Here, Schultz looks to the "collectivisation of these singular 'boreholes of insight'" that surround the power user as a first step, leading into (119):

The second criteria of change is the equivalent of what was called consciousness before, but is today rather a media process than a psychological one. In effect, the media architecture of the *information and communication* infrastructure has replaced the discursive function of the psychic apparatus, and clarity can only be regained in the plurality of a *parliament of things*. [...] The more intellectual property is collectified, the more sources are open, the more a critical mass of free knowledge becomes possible.

(119)

The commodity form surely reigns where it is no longer persons and interests that are to be collectivized, but intellectual property that is to be 'collectified' (as opposed to being merely 'collected,' perhaps). Here, consciousness, which once might have been historical and social, has been transferred to objects of information and communication, and clarity now waits upon such things forming (presumably) democratic governing

structures: this is a specific formula that is entirely compatible with, and does not threaten, the ongoing domination of social life under spectacle.

Although arriving from a different approach than that of Marxist critical theory, Olafson sets herself against this logic by focusing on what is expected of the power user in terms of labouring upon herself; this is the labour of forming an avatar, which in Olafson's deployment, comes to function as a form of social prosthesis. This approach brings the matter of production and consumption to the forefront in my account of her work.

Spectacle and Immaterial Labour

It should be noted here that the labour in which consumption and production are indistinguishable, as found in Schultz's account, shares a number of features with what is sometimes known as 'immaterial labour.' Though Schultz does not use the term 'immaterial labor' in "The Producer as Power User," he cites its use approvingly as he accounts for the "global production of affective and intellectual labour." (112)

Wolfgang Fritz Haug offers a useful critical account of this kind of immaterial labour in the entry of that name in his *Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism*. He traces this term from its coining by classical economists addressing Adam Smith's account of capitalism, through its rejection by Marx, to its "second life at the end of the twentieth century, this time with a broad influence, radiating even over the Left." (177) Haug characterizes immaterial labour in Antonio Negri's usage as the means by which:

not only is the concept of labour expanded beyond the boundaries of formal social labour, but it is also stretched out to include all possible intellectual, communicative, and emotional aspects of

activity or dimensions of production – from financial speculation
to giving birth to children. (177)

This catch-all sense of labour, “iridescently phrased in order to offer something to everyone,” has the character of a spectacular fetishism, in that it serves to unite what is otherwise divided, functioning “as a political slogan that aims at a new proletarian identification of the multiply divided working people in ‘post-Fordism.’” (177) And when Haug finds “it is appropriate to call the use of ‘immaterial labour’ a dialectic of appearance”, I adopt this critical sense of the term, as this understanding of immaterial labour is indeed well suited to the ideological self-reproduction of a society of the spectacle (178). In doing so, my account departs from the representation of alienated life as found in Brecht, and enters the conditions of possibility and limitation outlined in my reading of Benjamin and the *Arcades Project* in the previous chapter.

***AVATAR* and Spectacular Celebrity**

The classical dichotomy of production and consumption has been
melted down by the circuits of communication and given birth to
what marketing calls *the prosumer*. Also known as *power user* [...]
(Schultz, 111)

In another connection, the social role described by Schultz would be known as Debord's celebrity, those whose production is consumption as they “embody the inaccessible outcome of social *labour* by mimicking the by-products of that labour” (thesis 60). Where production and consumption become indistinguishable, the spectacle holds sway. The general condition of the power user is the market 'democratization' of the celebrity that was previously concentrated. Where Debord wrote of “the celebrity of

consumption,” who “makes majority approval into a pseudo-power over the lived,” in Schultz's telling, the votes are in and the majority approves of being made into celebrities themselves (thesis 60).

As to who the power user is, Schultz's opening paragraph slips from those caught in “the circumstances of today's media networks,” to the power users who have “left the factories and office buildings long ago,” to a totalization: “Everyone is a power user now, dependent on the degree of participation in the global communication apparatus.” (111) This is the ideological fantasy of the post-industrial society, and this slippage is characteristic, as Debord reminds us that the celebrity is no more general than their activity is varied (thesis 60), and that the only actual generality here is that of “the general law of obedience to the way of things.” (thesis 61) Only through submission to the illusory world of spectacular fetishism can the power user imagine her condition as general, and the world as the reflection and index of her own efforts.

In the initial phase of *AVATAR*, which I described above as dealing with pre-social media, the blending of production and consumption is not yet fully achieved. As Olafson takes a series of digital self-portraits and head-shots, seeking an image of herself she finds adequate, she sets a timer on the laptop and runs to the on-stage screen to compose herself before the image is taken. Once taken and displayed, for a moment Olafson appears in the pose and the picture alike, but this twinned image is then fragmented as Olafson returns to the laptop to try again, and this sudden duplication and splitting marks the transfer of subjective activity to the object, as the spectacular image is now ready to circulate on Olafson's behalf. There is also a third moment here between posing and re-setting the camera, the moment in which the picture is taken. Here a flash

of light, as a theatrical flash bulb, washes out the rear projection on the large screen and erases the clutter of the desktop, becoming for a moment an apparently solid surface backing Olafson's pose.

In the precession of these three moments, repeated on stage until Olafson is satisfied, we see her in two senses. One is in the subjective activity of setting the camera and posing, the other is in the object form of the images produced, now ready for uploading to a remote audience. However, the three moments which characterize this process remain distinct (fig. 6, 7 and 8).

This mode of image production, consumption and selection should be contrasted with that which emerges in the final phase of *AVATAR*. With the effects of the chromakey blue paint established by its use on the plywood wall, when Olafson applies the same paint to her body, production and consumption of images merge (fig 9 and fig 10). Previously Olafson was captured before a surface and projected upon a screen, yet now she serves as her own surface and screen, as she has remade her corporeality into a venue in which images are more free to be made, circulated and consumed.

Adorno, in “The Schema of Mass Culture,” which develops the 'culture industry' chapter in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, found that as the “omnipresence of technology imprints itself upon objects and everything historical,” the 'prototype' here was (78):

the actress who manages to appear fresh and painstakingly made up with her hair perfectly arranged even in the midst of the most appalling dangers, in a tropical typhoon or in the clutches of white slave traders. She is so closely, so precisely and so pitilessly

photographed that the magic which her make-up is intended to exert is heightened by the lack of illusion with which it is thrust before the viewer as literally true and unexaggerated. Mass culture is unadorned make-up. (78)

Olafson's work extends this logic, as 'unadorned make-up' intervenes in and comes to dominate the corporeality that labours to produce and consume images. Where Adorno's account found "the empty abstract semblance of a difference between culture as such and practice as such, the division of labour as it were between different departments of production," this "remnant" is now also done away with, and the merging Schultz identifies takes hold (64). As Olafson's avatar emerges a spectacular celebrity, not even an 'abstract semblance' of division in labour remains.

An Avatar as Spectacular Drag

Not only is this result fatal to the Brechtian 'step-out-of-character', as discussed in the previous chapter, but it is apparent that Olafson does not step *out* of an avatar, but *into* one: as the avatar starts to emerge onscreen, Olafson takes on the layers of color that permit her accession to a spectacular celebrity. Crucially the avatar's emergence does not involve the formation of a new subjectivity, since it is the outcome of a still-existing subject's desire and activity. Even as the avatar appears in the frame of a YouTube screen, Olafson directs her attention to the audience in a live question and answer session, collapsing the time and space shifting that a recorded video would provide: this further argues against an understanding in which the avatar could be said to be independent. Instead, amidst the recognition of the avatar as a social agent, one

that permits a social circulation otherwise unavailable, that the avatar is revealed as a social prosthesis. How then might *AVATAR*'s critical engagement be understood?

While Olafson does not regard gender as a primary element of *AVATAR*, the performance nevertheless makes clear that spectacular celebrity is subject to heteronormative regulation and production: particularly in the *A/S/L* scene, something of Laura Mulvey's notion of the 'male gaze' is unmistakably present, as is the sense of producing gendered images exemplifying what Mulvey called "to-be-looked-at-ness" (*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, 18). Yet the emergence of the avatar, and the sense of a spectacular corporeality, revises this familiar formulation.

The appearance of the avatar involves a variety of gendered signs and performances that, unlike those of *A/S/L*, break with a strict heteronormative gendering. In another production, the avatar might be more straightforwardly identified as queer or perhaps a queering, and the husky modification of Olafson's voice certainly trades on conventions of GLBTQ* performance. And here I am struck by Judith Butler's account of drag in "Imitation and Gender Insubordination":

Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. (21)

In many ways, spectacular corporeality and Butler's bodies that matter are irreducible. A spectacular celebrity labours on their corporeality to better prepare it for submission to the play of images, and following Debord, the individual only appears insofar as their reality is negated. This is unlike Butler's understanding of gender performativity, where the significance of bodies arises from being organized by their reliance and return to

elements present in an explicitly gendered performative matrix. This reliance and return, the compulsion, iterability and regulation of the performative, all these present bodies as ongoing contestations of signs.

Yet perhaps Butler's account of drag suggests a possibility, or might inspire a revision of this formula, one meant to engage with spectacular society, and illuminate the sense of critical corporeal engagement in *AVATAR*. Can an avatar be understood as a form of drag in this sense? An avatar is certainly a 'mundane appropriation and theatricalization,' but of gendered images, rather than genders. And while an avatar might be mistaken for an approximation or impersonation, these characteristics only arise from the negations of spectacular celebrity. Revised for critical performance under the spectacle, an avatar-as-drag would involve the everyday way in which images are taken on and the images of a possible social role are enacted, revealing that these images are alienated and alienating. Where the forms of immaterial labour and social media dominate the object form of a society, social recognition involves a labour of negation and submission, in preference for a venue for the free play of images. I believe this is the result made visible in *AVATAR*.

Part II: A Brief Overview of *HYPER_*

Olafson's *HYPER_*, with lighting design by Hugh Conacher, replaces Schultz's "I post therefore I am" with "I doubt therefore I am" as a starting point. This doubt is most explicitly focused on the various techniques and traditions of dance Olafson received in her training, but nevertheless produces a critical corporeal encounter in performance.

HYPER_ is set with a large scrim across the front of the stage, and a video camera above the audience. Early in the work, these are used to superimpose Olafson's image over her performance, or to display recordings of source material for the first three dance pieces. Ironically titled 'Authentic Movement,' these three scenes make light of a variety of sources for a dancer's inspiration: one of these includes the 'natural' movement of very young child, doing a move from a pole dance routine. These pieces are inter-cut with Olafson's "Keystroke Choreographies," short prerecorded videos of bodies found on-line, in Flash games and digital animation toys. Again, the tone is of ridicule, as in "Release Technique," a piece with a name that suggests a movement practice such as Joan Skinner's Releasing Technique, but consists of a digital mannequin endlessly falling and colliding with obstacles. The clumsy artificiality of these digital bodies is presented as being as preposterous as the 'authentic movement' pieces.

However, a different critical approach becomes visible in the second half of *HYPER_*. In a series of scenes, Olafson interrogates what occurs when 'authentic movement' is abandoned. What is left to her body in performance and in projection? The first of these scenes involve investigating the three dimensionality of her appearance on stage and on screen, as in "RGB," (fig. 11) where her image is split into red, green, and blue elements who then move with her on a time delay. As we are invited to put on the 3-d glasses provided, Olafson's performance veers between two and three dimensional forms (for technical reasons, no still images adequately capture this effect). As she 'swims' through the space, the sequence of images trailing her appear to move through a greater expanse of depth than she does. As these technical means of

producing apparent depth are applied to and removed from the performance, the dimensionality of Olafson's corporeal appearance is subject to a vertiginous shifting across surfaces and planes, and the depth presented to the audience becomes the product of an arrangement and rearrangement of images.

In the scene “Hyperbolic Doubt,” Olafson performs clad in a zentai suit (a latex body suit) which has an image of anatomical musculature printed on it (fig. 12). This addition of a layer covering her body appears to expose a layer beneath her skin, the 'machinery' of a dancer's craft. This addition-as-subtraction is taken further in “Above,” where the lighting is provided by ultraviolet 'black lights.' Olafson dances this scene naked, except for fluorescent body paint that traces a skeleton on her skin (fig. 13 and 14). Under the black light, this skeleton is all that is visible, save when extremely brief flashes of light suddenly return flesh to Olafson's appearance.

HYPER_ ends with “Object Oriented Ontology,” where Olafson, dressed in black and scrubbed of fluorescent paint, dances with a pair of fluorescent ribbons under the black light, which are then joined by a third, projected ribbon of light (fig. 15 and 16). She is now invisible but for her animating the two ribbons she holds, yet as the piece develops it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish these from the projected ribbon, and her on stage presence recedes behind what comes to look like a computer's screen saver.

Though less directly related to the alienation of social activity under spectacle, *HYPER_* nevertheless engages in a critical performance of appearance, one I believe might be understood in terms of 'complex seeing.'

Complex Seeing

The term 'complex seeing' is found in Brecht's notes to *The Threepenny Opera*, which he rewrote later under the title "The Literarization of the Theatre." Here Brecht objects to the orthodoxy that holds "the text must express everything within its own confines," as he argues (44):

[...] this passion for propelling the spectator along a single track where he can look neither right nor left, up nor down, is something that the new school of play-writing must reject. Footnotes, and the habit of turning back in order to check a point, need to be introduced into play-writing too.

Some exercise in complex seeing is needed—though it is perhaps more important to be able to think above the stream than to think in the stream. ("The Literarization of the Theater," *Brecht on Theatre*, 44)

However, it is Raymond Williams who more substantially develops the concept of complex seeing, going far beyond what Brecht indicates in this article. Williams' expansion and reevaluation of complex seeing can be found in a number of places, including "The Achievement of Brecht," published in *Critical Quarterly* in 1961, the chapter on Brecht in *Modern Tragedy* from 1966, and the relevant chapter in *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* from 1968.

In each of these texts, when Williams first brings up Brecht's 'complex seeing', he does so in order to identify the fault he finds there. However, his diagnosis varies in the telling. In *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, Williams finds that Brecht:

[...] is still prescribing an attitude for the spectator:

characteristically, after a failure of just that kind, in which the “cheerful amorality” [...] had been accepted and enjoyed rather than looked at and criticized. “Complex seeing”, in fact, had to be more than enjoined on a spectator; it had to be realized in a play.

(281)

Here Williams reads Brecht as passing responsibility for complex seeing from the dramatist to the spectator, and Williams insists the epic theatre must not rely on 'prescribing' or 'enjoining' the audience to accomplish what the play does not. This should be contrasted to his “The Achievement of Brecht,” which responds to the same lines from Brecht with a different concern:

He certainly considered that he had written the play in such a way that this complex seeing was enforced [...] But he was still himself confused, himself not distanced [...] (155)

Here the emphasis is on the failure to 'enforce' complex seeing because Brecht himself was not yet seeing clearly or complexly. And yet again, this account should be placed in tension with the closely related text found in *Modern Tragedy*. Here Williams directs our attention to the sense of possibility Brecht presents when the spectator is, “in theory, able to give the theatre a new function” (193):

'In theory' is right. Brecht had found his theory, in the idea of complex seeing, but its practice was not there, in the actual play.

(193)

Yet beyond these three ascribed errors, Williams sees enormous value in the concept, taking complex seeing more seriously, perhaps, than Brecht does, and undertaking to remedy its flaws. Williams positions complex seeing as Brecht's "most original dramatic contribution" ("Achievement of Brecht", 156), "a new principle and a new start" (*Modern Tragedy*, 195), or the "key to Brecht's real originality" (*Drama From Ibsen to Brecht*, 281). Williams also undertakes to narrate Brecht's work after *The Threepenny Opera* according to its manifestations of complex seeing, looking towards "a complex seeing which was the dramatic action itself." (282)

Williams' varied accounts of this narrative place a particular significance on *The Good Woman of Sezuan* as a particular achievement in complex seeing. *Drama From Ibsen to Brecht* finds the importance of this play in its engagement with:

[...] goodness and badness in the act of being produced in the turns of an action, as coexisting possibilities. This is genuinely complex seeing, and it is deeply integrated with the dramatic form. (283)

In his ongoing discussion of complex seeing, Williams substantially revises the sense of that term. He dispenses with Brecht's metaphor of being within or above a stream or flow, and does not assign priority to one or the other of the 'coexisting possibilities' he identifies. Williams instead finds that the "romantic" and "anti-romantic" responses to "the problems of a good woman in a bad society" are inadequate on their own (282):

Each of these versions is simple seeing, from alternative points of view. But what Brecht now does is in effect to embody both versions. (283)

Williams' complex seeing is no longer a matter of within and without, but exists, on the one hand, in contradistinction to a 'simple' and unsuitable seeing, and on the other, in a combination of those 'simple seeings': perhaps then a very particular type of binocular vision. This binocular vision must, however, be 'embodied' in the dramatic form, not merely appealed to in the audience's activity.

***HYPER_* as Complex Seeing**

While Brecht advances the use of projecting scene titles onto screens in the “The Literarization of the Theater,” he does so as “a primitive attempt at literarizing” (43). Olafson's *HYPER_* makes no such effort, and the use of the scrim, zentai suit, fluorescent paint and lighting are instead, I believe, a sophisticated attempt at engaging something of the dual character of complex seeing. Not only does Olafson's movement in the second half of *HYPER_* find her merging and emerging in the flow of images projected before the audience, the use of 3-d glasses, for example, shifts our sense of depth repeatedly. These glasses, of course, depend on an effect on a two dimensional surface even as they offer an illusory depth which appears more substantial than that of Olafson's body. This doubled production of images does not then deal with 'goodness and badness' as coexisting possibilities, but the depths of image and body being 'produced in the turn of an action' or flick of a switch.

A similar analysis applies to the scenes “Above” and “Hyperbolic Doubt,” where the projection of images on the scrim combines with the application and removal of layers to Olafson's body. The contrasts between these doubled images of Olafson's performance reveal muscles, bones and skin as the effects of light and layers, and her corporeality appears increasingly to serve as surface supporting that play.

From its start, to ending with “Object Oriented Ontology,” where she appears only indirectly, the whole process of *HYPER_* involves a kind of complex seeing that opposes Olafson's being to her techniques and technologies of appearance. She doubts and tests the various corporeal qualities of her body and its training in dance, and finds them subject to the varied and fantastic play of light on surfaces. Olafson increasingly removes herself and her body from the performance, leaving depth, muscle, bone, flesh and activity behind just as she abandoned 'authentic movement.' In doing so, she does not address the problems of 'a good woman in a bad society,' but of corporeal engagement in a society dominated by images and image-making technologies. In this way, we watch as she makes of herself the appendage of these technologies of appearance, which takes the form of a corporeality that serves as a screen. As she does so, it increasingly becomes apparent that these technologies, and their shaping of images as light that plays on surfaces, form the privileged, 'authentic' bodies on stage and in projection. It is the logic of the spectacle that is demonstrated here, and something of complex seeing is the means by which this is made apparent.

Conclusion

My dissertation ends with my advancing of possibilities in the face of a development of commodity fetishism which testifies to the unity of life and representation. This spectacular development establishes a basis for seeing persons as images. While the current ongoing intensification of social media offers a particularly obvious index of this phenomenon, a critical understanding of spectacle demonstrates how these conditions threaten to foreclose critical representation. Against this outcome, I propose a reconsideration of Brechtian theatre practices: where the spectacle reigns, how might images find critical purchase on images? In confronting this challenge, I present my rethinking of corporeality (which is distinct from, though partially overlapping with, those emerging from psychological or semiotic theorizations) as offering a productive register for both examining the ongoing development of alienation as well as approaching a response on stage. This left-Hegelian corporeality, understood as productive capacities and dexterities and their organization, offers a means to connect the concerns of historical materialism to the practices of Brechtian theatre. In particular, my engagement with these historical materialist concerns in critical theatrical representation include labour and its ongoing ('immaterial') transformation under capital, as well as prosthetic and other technological mediations of bodies and subjects, and social media and its objectification of persons.

My focus on corporeality emphasizes the contemporary process of social recognition mediated by images, in which bodies emerge from an alienating dialectic of object and subject. The labours of these spectacular practices to compose bodies obeys a particular logic, that of commodity fetishism, which provides a means to locate an

illusory presence of wholeness amidst the circulation of images. The desire for recognition under spectacle, which negates individuality, drives the representational forms of commodity fetishism, creating an artificial realm where alienated bodies can be given legibility as spectacular celebrities, united in their separation. As I have attempted to show, it is this social fetishism that is the decisive condition for both corporeality and its Brechtian representation under capital, and it is this fetishism which my theorization is meant to grasp and bring into contact with Olafson's *AVATAR* and *HYPER_*.

Illustrations

All images courtesy Freya Olafson

Figure 1 – AVATAR, 4m06s

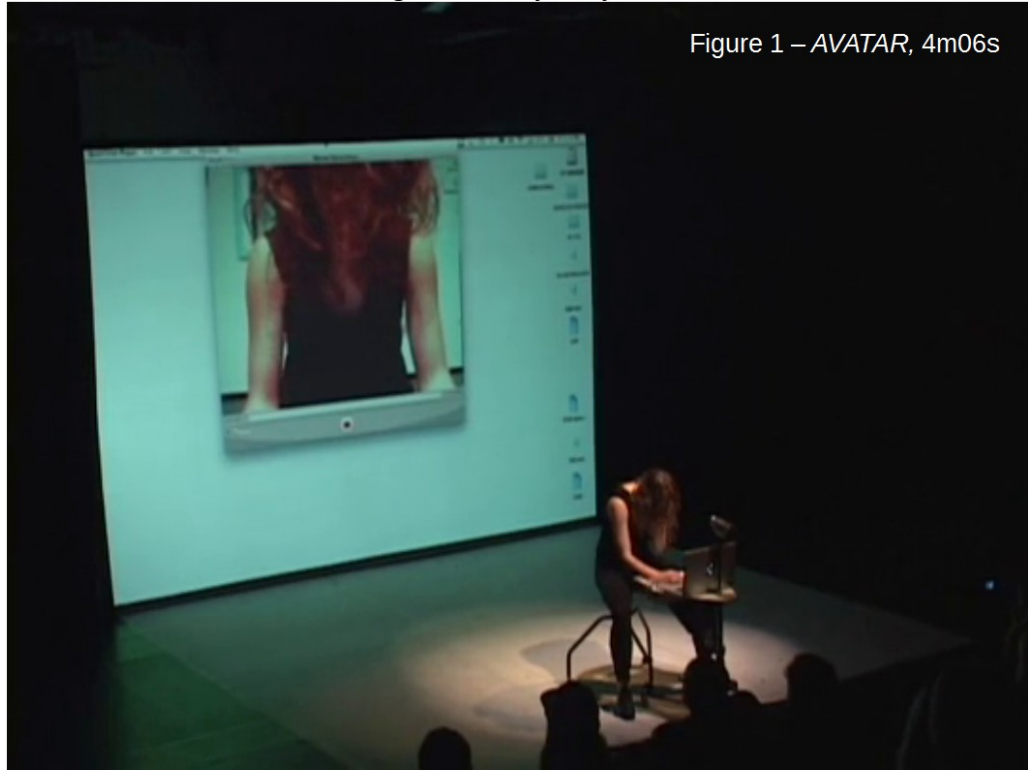


Figure 2 – AVATAR, 16m01s

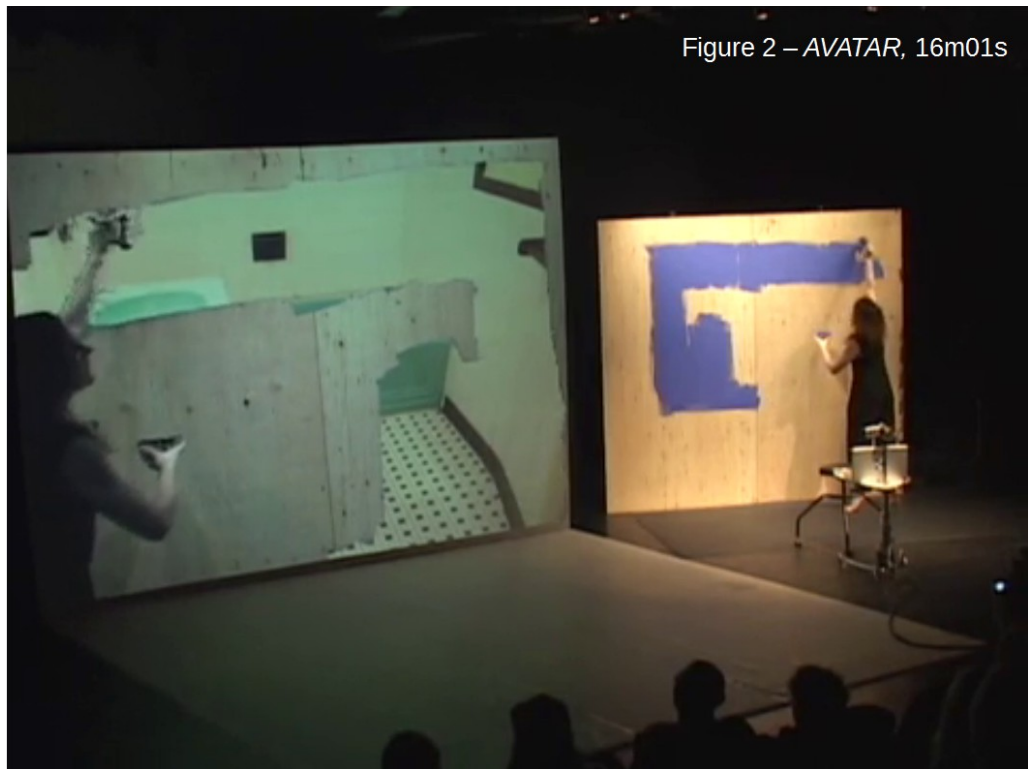


Figure 3 – AVATAR, 22m58s



Figure 4 – AVATAR, 45m53s



Figure 5 – AVATAR,
Promotional Photo
Photographer: Hugh Conacher



Figure 6 – AVATAR, 2m14s

Figure 7 – AVATAR, 2m18s



Figure 8 – AVATAR, 2m19s

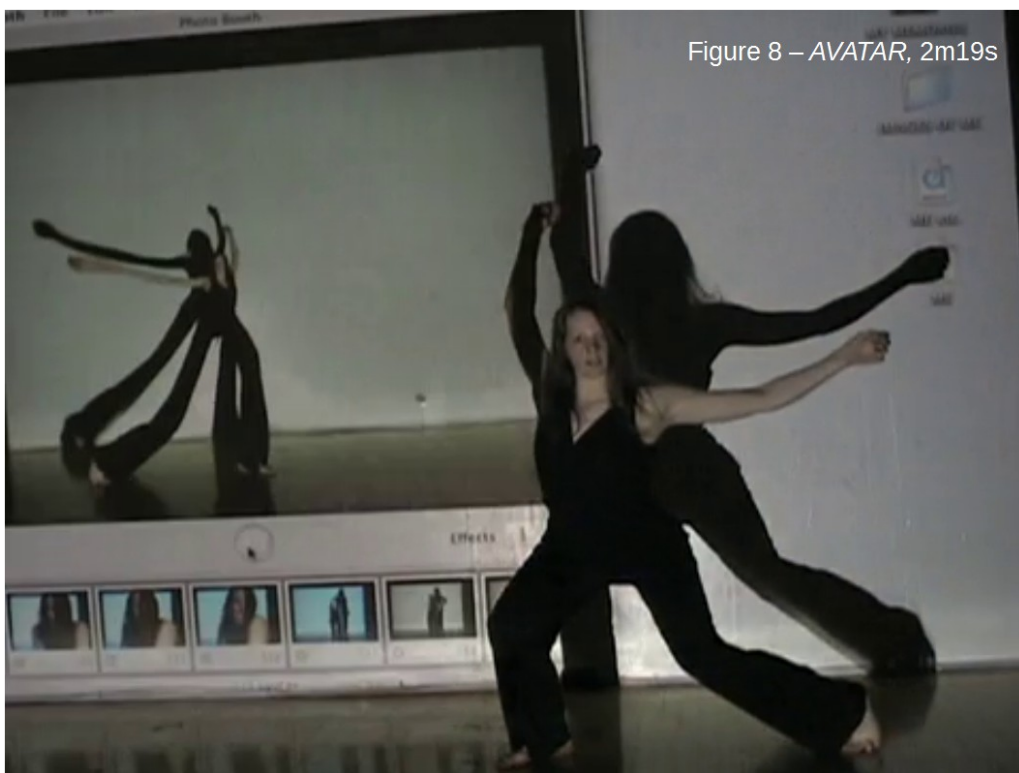


Figure 9 – AVATAR, 38m34s

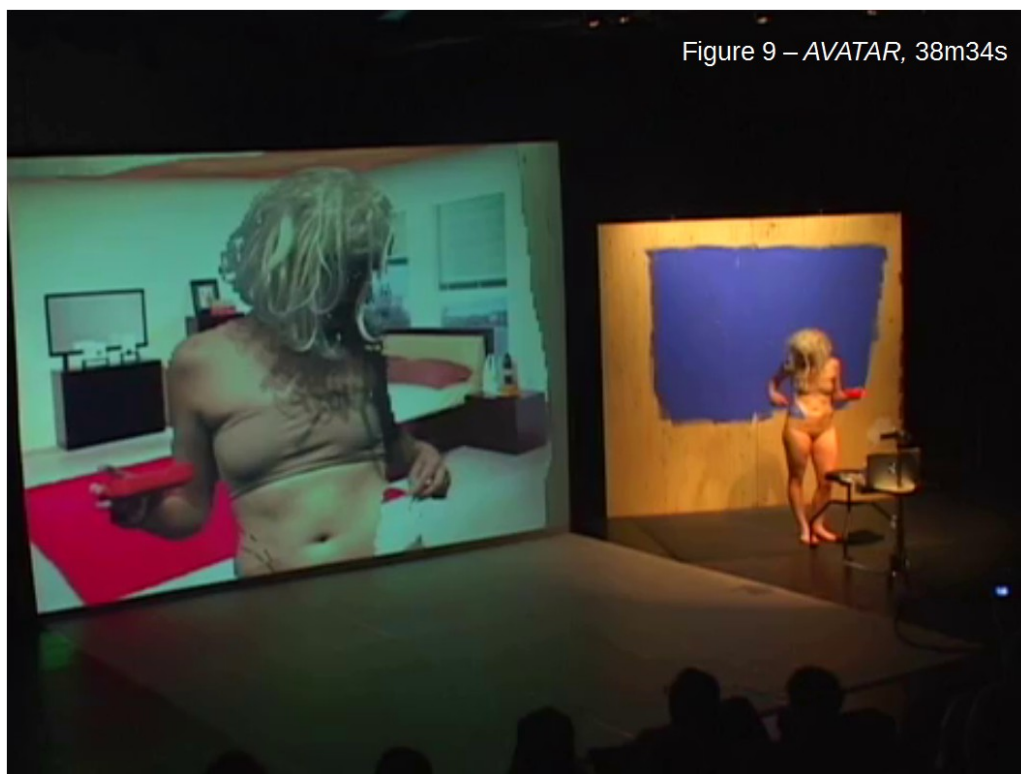


Figure 10 – AVATAR, 38m52s

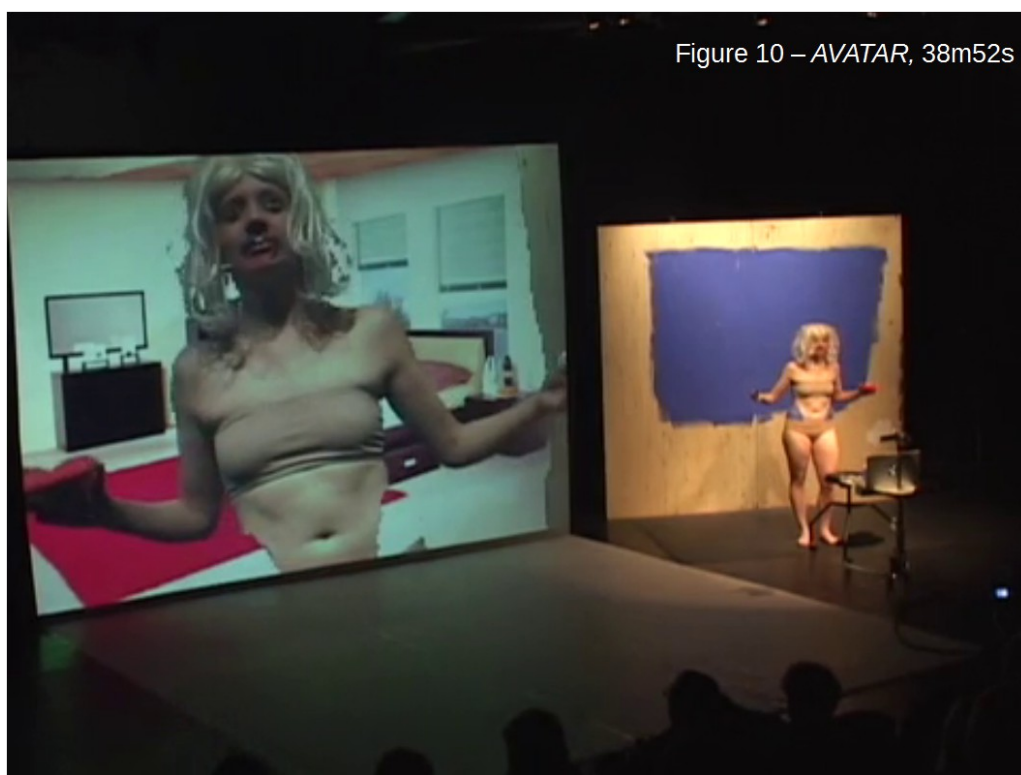


Figure 11 – *HYPER_*, “RGB”,
26m57s

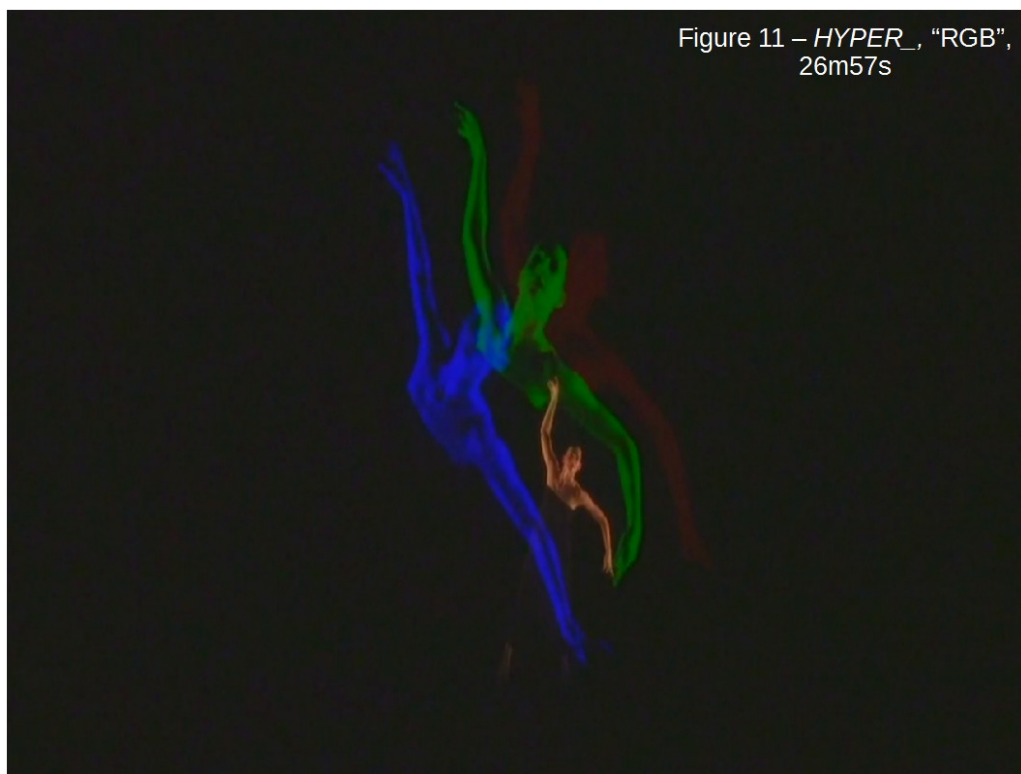
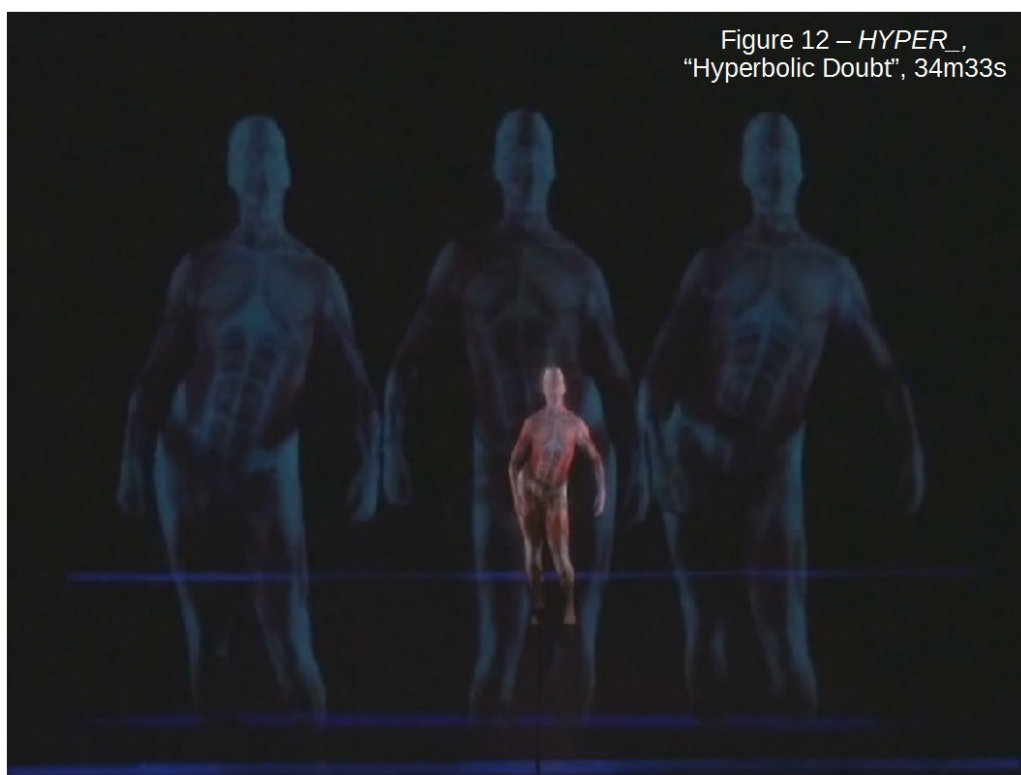


Figure 12 – *HYPER_*,
“Hyperbolic Doubt”, 34m33s



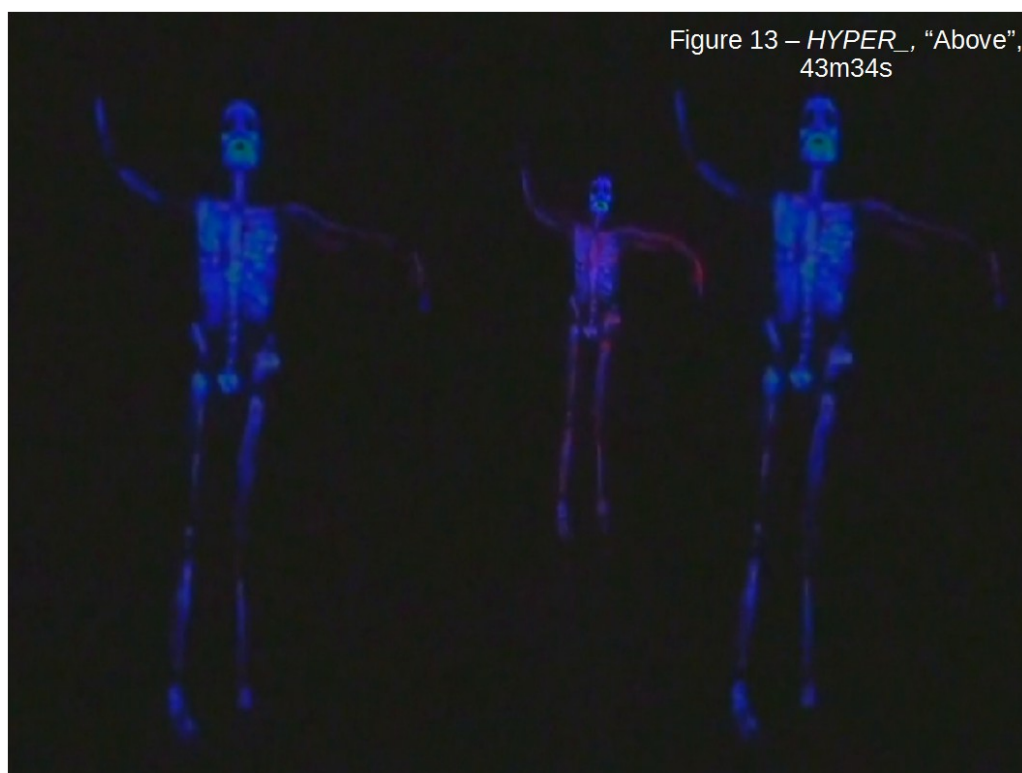


Figure 14 – *HYPER_*, “Above”,
Promotional Photo
Photographer: Hugh Conacher

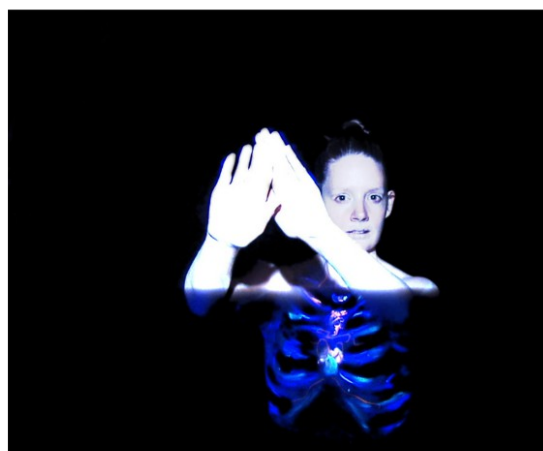


Figure 15 – *HYPER_*, “Object
Oriented Ontology”, 51m24s

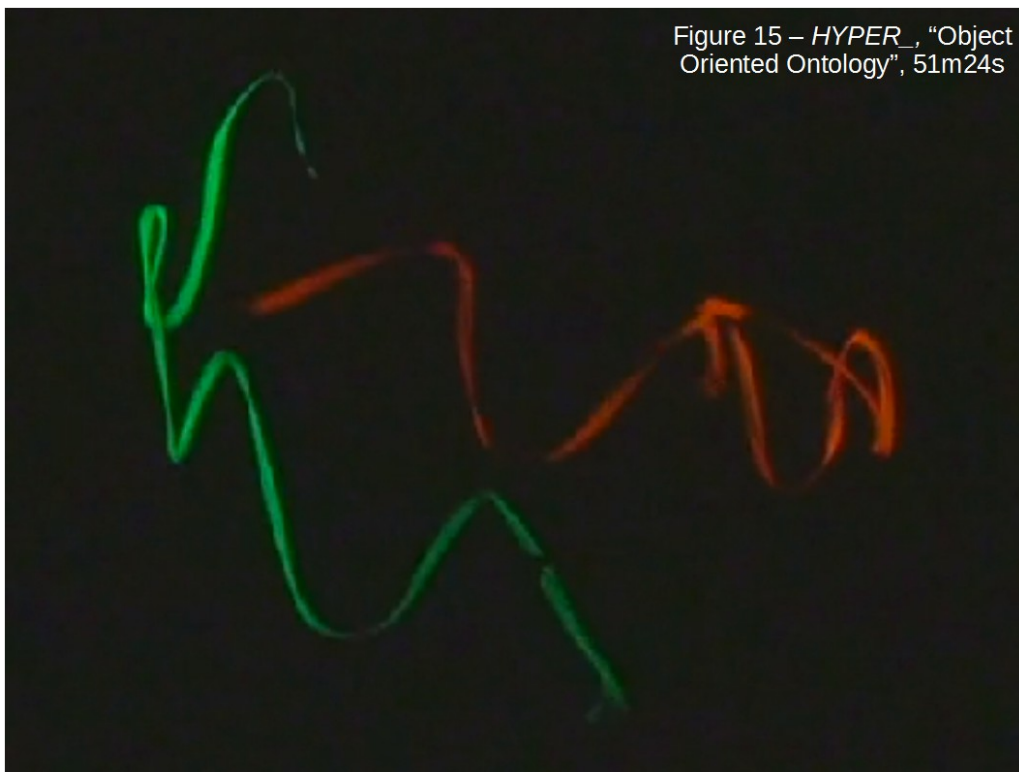
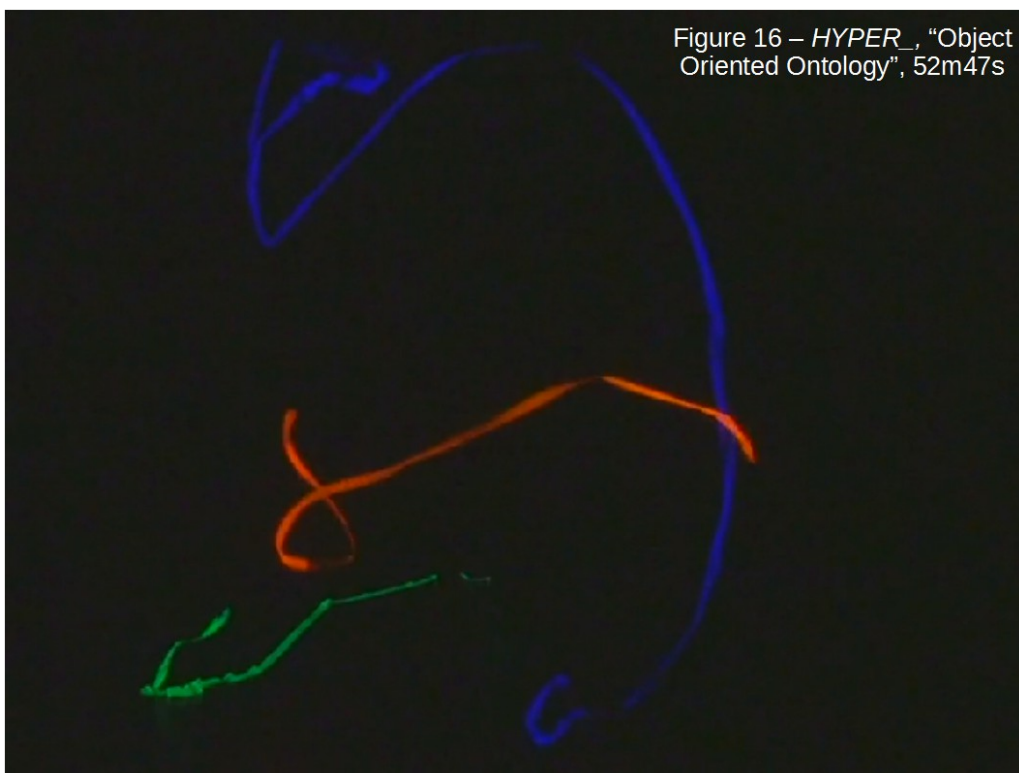


Figure 16 – *HYPER_*, “Object
Oriented Ontology”, 52m47s



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